

*Bishop's Address*

*To the 110<sup>th</sup> Session of the Synod of*

*The Diocese of Rupert's Land*

*September 30, 2010.*

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

Let us pray. God of light and life, the psalmist assures us that, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." [Psalm 119:105] Open our minds and hearts to receive the life-giving gift of your Word. May we be grasped and transformed by that Word, so as we listen, speak, and make decisions for the ministry and mission of the Diocese of Rupert's Land, we will rightly discern the paths on which your light is shining. Give us grace and courage to make those paths our own, so that together we, and all whom we touch, will walk the path of the Way, the Truth and the Life, your Son Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

We begin this gathering of Synod, conscious of those who are not here – in particular, all of the past members of the Synod who have left us and gone on to a closer communion with the Lord, especially Bishop Patrick Lee of this Diocese. We are conscious of the loss of the Parish of St. Catherine's, and pray for God's healing and reconciling grace for all of us who are touched by these losses.

I want to give thanks to God for all of you – not just for those gathered in this place – but for all of the people who consider themselves members of this Anglican Church of Rupert's Land, and especially for those who serve as clerical and lay leaders. I want to recognize and give thanks for our 3 archdeacons: Godfrey Mawejje, Norman Collier and Jennifer Sisson along with the parishes of St. Clements and St. Georges, St. Mary La Prairie and Good Shepherd who graciously enable their priests to carry out this ministry for us all. I also give thanks for our recently retired Dean, Bob Osborne, and for the present interim ministry at the Cathedral of Canon Rick Condo.

On behalf of all of us, I want to give thanks for the people I work with at the Synod Office. I am conscious of having completed ten years of episcopal ministry in this Diocese this past May; but this is eclipsed by the exemplary service record of Cathy Mondor, who has been with us for fifteen years, and Susan Suppes, who has just completed thirty years of faithful ministry in our midst! And I am grateful to share in ministry with Bernice Funk, Diane Trenholm, as well as Terence Moore of the Rupert's Land News and Gloria Romaniuk, Archivist, along with Jennifer Ching and our faithful Archives volunteers. While there are too many to be named, I want to give thanks for all of those who offer time, talent and money to the many ministries in our diocese – particularly to those whose reports are part of the Convening Circular. Please note in the reports who those people are, and offer a prayer of support and thanksgiving for their ministries. Finally I want to give thanks to God for my family, and especially for Nancy who, in addition to her own ministries in our midst, makes my life and ministry in this place possible.

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's life, has been exemplary, and whose Christian witness we wish to lift up for the rest of the Church. I am delighted to announce that

Mrs. Heather Birtles, the Rev. William Blackburn and Mr. Jim Warrener will be admitted as members of the Order of Rupert's Land; and the Rev. Barry Bear and the Rev. Donna Joy will be admitted as Canons of St. John's Cathedral chapter. We will recognize these persons in prayer and commissioning later in this service. In addition I want to announce publicly the appointment of several new District Deans. Our Diocese is subdivided into six Deaneries, within which a District Dean helps to coordinate and build community between the clergy and parishes in the Deanery. In this way, they share in the pastoral care of the episcopal ministry of the Church. Four new Deans have been appointed in the last few months. They are: James Bardsley of Stonewall for Matheson Deanery; Rod Sprange of St. Barnabas, Winnipeg, for Kildonan Deanery; Trudy Thorarinson of Carman for Portage/Pembina Deanery; and David Widdicombe of St. Margaret's, Winnipeg, for Central Winnipeg Deanery. These Deans will be joining Gordon Shields of Assiniboia Deanery and Geoff Woodcroft of Forts/Seine River Deanery.

Our Synod theme is "Making Paths in the Desert." Let's become conscious of life in a desert. Deserts don't have to be sandy, though most are. They are definitely dry and they are places that make life difficult. Living organisms must adapt in special ways. If they don't, it is not just that things will be more difficult. Organisms that refuse or are unable to adapt to the living conditions of the desert will die. Deserts are difficult places in which to build permanent roads, erect trail markers or establish uniform ways of doing things. For one thing, a shift in the winds can completely obliterate a well-planned path. A sandstorm can make travel impossible. And equipment designed for surviving the heat of the day can leave one in trouble to deal with the cold of the night.

God's People of ancient Israel had first-hand experience of the desert when they were liberated in God's Exodus out of Egypt and spent forty years wandering in the wilderness before finally being led into God's Promised Land. Some important things happened for them during those times in the desert – most important being that they became a single nation, recognising that their strength lay in being together as God's People. But these were tough times. They were fraught with danger, fear, rebellion and disappointment, as well as miraculous provision and an experience of God's daily presence that they had never known before.

It was in the midst of their dissatisfaction with God and with their leadership that they shouted out, as a taunt or a dare, "Can God spread a table in the wilderness?" During that time of fear and discouragement, it was special and sometimes miraculous signs of life that kept them together and kept them going. We have lots of signs of decline, of threat and discouragement in our midst. Most, though not all, of our parishes have shown significant decline in the last several decades. As a result, what we are able to accomplish together through our Common Ministry and Mission is a mere fraction of what we were doing 20 years ago. While we know this is not the way things should be, it is difficult not to put our focus on "mere survival" and of an even more grave concern – insuring survival of one part of our body to the detriment of the rest.

So what are the signs of life in our midst? In the desert one has to be able to see with greater clarity in order to discern the sometimes subtle but rigorous signs of life. Here are some places where I see God providing life. Firstly, there was the final result of our diocesan ministry and mission at the end of 2009. Those of you who were present for the special Synod fifteen months ago learned that we were struggling with the prospect of a financial deficit as large as \$70,000 by year end. Through sacrificial gifts from

individuals, from parishes over and above their earlier commitments, an improvement in the world markets and careful managing of our expenses, we actually ended the year with a small surplus.

Secondly, I want to speak of the Mapleton Lane Life-Lease project of St. Clement's Parish on the edge of Selkirk. This is an example of a small parish that God stirred with a large vision. As a result, there now stands a beautiful multi-storey building of apartments that actually dwarfs the historic stone Church in which this worshipping community heard and responded to God's call.

Next, I want to speak of saint benedict's table. This little community started as a kind of experiment in trying to dig deep into the treasure of our ancient tradition and express it in ways that speak to the 21<sup>st</sup> century and into our future. It is now the worshipping home of a couple of hundred members – of all ages – and most encouragingly of lots of people in their twenties and thirties. And it has become a vessel in which God's creative gifts of word, song, sacrament and image are unleashed and shared.

Finally, I want to focus on the transformation of St. Matthew's, Winnipeg – still very much in its early stages. This is a story of new birth emerging by letting go of an old body – in this case its glorious traditional building. Most of the building will be re-designed and given over to housing for the community. The emphasis on community ministries is continuing as is the small but essential worshipping, ministering community we know as St. Matthew's. It is another sign of God's life springing forth in the desert.

I share these few examples, knowing that you will know of many more that have escaped my gaze. Make sure you do not limit what God is doing to the poverty of my perception. Rather, let God use these few examples to help you see the many other signs of life in the apparent desert in which we find ourselves.

These signs of life do not change the challenges of making paths in the desert. Rather, they are evidence of the most important truth – that God is indeed in our midst – alive and active. As we prayed in tonight's psalm canticle: "Surely God is my salvation; I will trust, and not be afraid ... for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel." [*Isaiah 12: 2a, 6b*]

In the middle section of Isaiah, the author speaks on several occasions of One who is sent from God who, through his service, will save Israel. Matthew, in his Gospel, makes the connection between Jesus and this Servant of God and, quoting Isaiah, says of Jesus, "He will not break a bruised reed or quench a smoldering wick until he brings justice to victory." [*Matthew 12:20*] It is common for certain forms of life to live in a precarious condition in the desert – just as likely to have its life extinguished as extended, entirely dependent on subtle changes in its living conditions. I want to highlight some of those "fragile organisms" in our midst – so that we are careful to give them the nurture and care they urgently need.

The first of these is our ministry with, by and for the **youth** in our midst. A few dedicated disciples continue to nurture this ministry in the diocesan sphere, a few parishes give intentional support and energy to this ministry. It is not that this tender "reed" needs to be soaked in financial resources that we don't have. It needs our attention. It needs to be in our thoughts and prayers, in our planning and programming. It needs to be given space to grow and it needs to be nurtured by us all.

One of these "smoldering wicks" is our ministry with, for, and to **aboriginal persons**. The needs which the Rupert's Land Aboriginal Circle (RLAC) and its sister arm, Wechetowin, are trying to address will always vastly outstrip the resources that seem to be readily available. Even so, this "smoldering wick" needs each

of our “little lights.” The important step that we need to take on this path in the desert, is to search out our own thoughts and feelings about these first Canadians (whether we’re aboriginal or non-aboriginal), take the time to learn about and share the truth of our common story – both the dark and bright parts, (and there are bright parts) and to realize that God is calling us to make a common path that helps us to accept our differences as a gift that enriches, rather than a problem that threatens. This Synod will be asked to take one of those steps by publicly repudiating the Doctrine of Discovery that is seen as the foundation for much of the misunderstanding and pain experienced between aboriginal and non-aboriginal Canadians. This ministry’s vitality is precarious. It requires more than just good intentions on our part. We need to develop disciplined, achievable steps, in our lives, in our parishes, and across the diocese, in order to make and walk on this path together.

Another of these “smoldering wicks” is the **Faculty of Theology of St. John’s College** at the University of Manitoba. You may not realize that St. John’s College was created by and for the Diocese of Rupert’s Land – for both theological education and higher learning in the classical disciplines. The Bishop of Rupert’s Land is, by statute, the Chancellor of the College. The Diocesan Council appoints a sizable portion of the members of College Council, and the Bishop of Rupert’s Land nominates the person to be appointed as Warden, or Principal, to the College Council for appointment. For a variety of reasons, the life of this “smoldering wick” is now precarious. A year and a half ago, the Executive Committee began to respond, at least with intent, by passing this resolution: “The Diocese of Rupert’s Land believes that the presence of a local Anglican theological education and formation resource is absolutely critical to the long-term viability of ministry in the Diocese of Rupert’s Land. The Faculty of Theology of St. John’s College is understood by the Diocese to be the primary provider of this education.” It may be that the kind of specifically Anglican theological education we will need from St. John’s will look different in order to meet our present and future needs. It is critical that we do a comprehensive determination of those needs so that we can articulate clearly what we require. And, I am aware that we may want to access other ministry training opportunities as well. But I cannot say strongly enough how important a local Anglican theological resource is, and will be, to the future of our Diocese. This is a path that can bring life and nurture to many of our paths in the desert. Without it, many of our paths might quickly become impassable.

So what lies ahead? How do we equip ourselves to make these paths in the desert? What is the vision? What is the plan? During this past year, in response to at least a couple of diocesan Synods, the Way Forward, and numerous requests by parishes and individuals, we put in place a plan to look objectively at ourselves – to “take stock” of ourselves as parishes. Trying to include the best of other dioceses’ experience, and to avoid the pitfalls, we embraced Phase One of the Vitality and Viability study. While the work was coordinated by a small, very dedicated and hard-working team, the effort was really built and carried out by the whole diocese, and this in itself has become a source of pride and a sign of life. What is the ultimate or foundational goal of this work? It is the first step in becoming intentional about insuring the effectiveness of the mission of God at work in and through every Anglican in the Diocese of Rupert’s Land. The feedback from Phase One has just been shared with the parishes. In this context, it might be thought of as a “snap shot” – an initial look at each parish’s “path” in this desert in which we live. Some of those paths look more vital or more viable than others. The point of the analysis is not to look inward – comparing one path to another. It is to cause us to look outward – toward each other – and around the community in which we live. The goal is to help each path move toward greater vitality and viability. Phase Two and its Team are presently being put in place. Its purpose will be to “walk with parishes” as they

integrate the feedback of Phase One into their path and discern how God is calling them to greater vitality and viability. I've heard it said that some worry that these reports will simply collect dust on a shelf – to be disposed of 10 years later. We've already made sure that won't happen – because a report has been sent to each parish *about itself*. One way to get my attention is to give me honest feedback about myself. I might challenge it, or I might act on it, but I won't simply "leave it on the shelf." In tonight's context, think of Phase One of the Vitality and Viability Study as a careful analysis of the paths that we already have in the desert – where they're strong and where they're not.

The next step is to have an overall plan for making paths. How do we know where the paths need to go and what they need to help us accomplish? When the General Synod of our Anglican Church of Canada was wrestling with the same question, it turned to the five Marks of Mission which are common to the whole Anglican Communion. We've re-oriented ourselves to the fact that God is the one who has the mission, and that God has called us together as Church in order to participate in that mission. We are confident that when we are engaged in the Marks of Mission, we are truly engaged in God's mission. Here are the five Marks:

1. Proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom
2. Teach, baptize and nurture new believers
3. Respond to human need by loving service
4. Seek to transform the unjust structures of society
5. Strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth.

These are the marks that should guide and govern our conversations about vitality and viability. How can we be structured and resourced in a way that enables every Anglican to participate in meaningful and life-giving ways in these five marks? These are the marks that should guide and govern our Common Ministry and Mission and the Diocesan structures that support it. Phase One of the Vitality and Viability study asked, "Should the structures and processes of the governance and leadership of the Diocese of Rupert's Land undergo an assessment of Vitality and Viability?" The overwhelming response was "yes." I was actually part of framing that question and I think it follows naturally in the work we are doing. The structures and processes of governance and leadership need to be as vital and viable as possible in supporting the parishes and membership to engage in the Five Marks of Mission.

Next, we need to be attentive to the attitudes and norms that we will need in order to be effective at making paths in the desert together. The first, and I think the most important, are the assumptions that we are to make about one another – in our parishes, between parishes, and between a parish and the diocesan structure. Tonight's Epistle Reading from Paul's letter to the Romans reads like a mini-sermon on the life of the baptized person and the baptized community. After asserting the victory that Christ *has already accomplished for each of us*, how the power of sin has already been destroyed, he exhorts us: "So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus." [Roman 6: 11] Does Paul actually think that all of the baptized will never sin again? Of course not, but what he does challenge us to do is to consciously and conscientiously dissociate ourselves from thoughts, speech, attitudes and actions that are sinful – separate from God. And, he challenges us to *trust one another* that we are all trying to live this new life! What does this mean for us in Rupert's Land? Firstly, it means that we need to make a priority the healing of divisions and misunderstanding, prejudice and fear. None of these are of God. All of us carry hurts from bad experiences in the Church. The only way we will move beyond them is to pray for God's

grace and healing, and to come to know, respect and trust those of whom we are most suspicious. We are coming from a past in our Diocese, where there was hurt, suspicion, fear and lack of trust between clergy, between diocesan leaders and clergy and parishes, and between parishes themselves. There are hopeful signs of a new and brighter future. I know that I need to challenge myself to let go of old hurts and suspicions and trust that God really is leading and guiding this Church. I challenge you to do the same. We also need to redefine our vocabulary of parish and diocese. When we speak of a parish, we are talking about the Diocese of Rupert's Land in a certain locality. And when we speak of the Diocese, we're not referring to an office in Winnipeg. We are talking about all of the members and parishes together. As one who works in the diocesan structure, I know I can be just as guilty of the "us" and "them" thinking as parish leadership can be. There is no "us" and "them." There is only "us" locally and "us" meaning all of us. This transformation can not merely be wishful thinking. It will be absolutely necessary if we are to make the paths into the future that we need to make together. If we can "get this right", issues about Common Ministry and Mission, Stewardship, support of special ministry and mission projects will not be difficult, because we will be able to have conversations that are characterized by all of the participants actively working at "considering themselves dead to sin and alive to God in Jesus Christ.", and believing that about each other. I believe we witnessed that grace at work two weeks ago at our Pre-Synod Forum. Now we can carry that same attitude, that same Spirit, into these next two days of our Synod meeting.

Finally, we need to take to heart Jesus' words in tonight's reading from John's Gospel: "Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father." [John 14:12] J.B. Phillips, to whom I wish I could claim I was related, wrote a book entitled Your God's too small. Think of the number of times you've looked at a group in your parish, or your whole congregation, or the diocesan leadership, and thought to yourself, "You know, they could do this, if only they *believed* they could do it!" I know I have thought that way about some of you on many occasions but I have failed at being able to open your eyes to the possibilities. And you probably have experienced that with me. We will never accomplish anything that God is calling us to do if we don't believe, with God's grace, that we can do it. As we make paths in the desert, we will need to focus on what God seems to be opening up, bringing to our minds, gathering us together to consider, and not waste time and energy worrying about what we're not able to do, or about the "doors that seem to close in our faces," or in tonight's image, the paths that seem to be continually blown in and filled with sand.

So confident is Jesus of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in his disciples, that he doesn't just say to them, "I don't know if you realized this, but I've given you the Holy Spirit." He says of the Spirit, "You know him, because he abides with you." God does not doubt what the Spirit can and will do in and through us. It is we who struggle to own the reality of the gift. Likewise, Jesus tells us that we know where the paths should go, that we are to follow. We already know the way! And Thomas, probably answering for most of us says, "How can we know the way?" – even though the Lord of the universe has just told us that we know the way! So to us, as to those First Century disciples, our Lord calmly tells us, "I am the way, and the truth and the life."

We need to begin making some paths together over these next few days. Some of those paths will be represented in decisions made. Most of them will be built in relationships made, strengthened and celebrated! Thanks be to the God in our midst! Amen!