

Bishop's Address
to the 111th Session of the Synod of
The Diocese of Rupert's Land
October 18, 2012

Let us pray. "Gracious God, the source of all life, your Son offered living water to the woman at the well in Samaria, promising that it would become a spring of water gushing up to eternal life; so open our minds, our hearts, and our whole lives, that your Word will call forth that wellspring in us. By your grace, use the words of my mouth and the motivations of our hearts and minds to transform us more fully into your faithful disciples, and equip us to witness to your living Christ in our world, through Jesus, our Healer and Redeemer." AMEN.

We begin this gathering of Synod, thankful for this land on which we live and prosper; thankful for those who welcomed our familial ancestors over the past few centuries and thankful for the grace of God which has called us together, as disciples, into this Church we call Rupert's Land. We remember those fellow disciples who, since we last met together in this Synod, have left us and gone on to a closer communion with our Lord.

While I want to devote the major portion of this Address to what I believe God is calling us to, I first want to give thanks for all of you who represent the congregations of Rupert's Land. Without you, the Diocese would simply be a geographic and demographic category. YOU make it a living and ministering reality. I want to express my deep appreciation and affection for those with whom I have the privilege of working on a regular basis – for the part-time and full-time members of our Diocesan Staff – few in number – huge in commitment and expertise: Diane Trenholm, Cathy Mondor, Bernice Funk, and Susan Suppes, who continues to persevere with her 4th bishop of Rupert's Land and still keeps smiling – along with our Rupert's Land News Editor, Terence Moore, our Archivist, Gloria Romaniuk, and the hard-working Archives volunteers. I also want to acknowledge the faithful ministries of our Archdeacons and their parishes who support them: Godfrey Mawejje and St. Clements, Mapleton and St. George's, Wakefield, Jennifer Sisson and Good Shepherd, Winnipeg, James Bardsley and Church of the Ascension, Stonewall, and our more recently-appointed Dean, Paul Johnson and the people of our Cathedral. In addition, I want to recognize our six District Deans, Simon Blaikie, Brad Elliott, Lyndon Hutchison-Hounsell, Trudy Thorarinson, David Widdicombe and Geoff Woodcroft who regularly gather our clerical leaders for mutual support, respond to concerns, offer pastoral care, and refer important issues to my attention. These are joined by all of those who offer time, talent and treasure to the many ministries of our Diocese – locally in parishes and beyond – particularly those whose reports are part of our Convening Circular. Finally, I want to give thanks for the many of you who remember me in prayer, inquire as to my personal well-being, and support me in my work as bishop and in my long-suffering doctoral studies – particularly

my family and especially my spouse Nancy who, in addition to her own ministries in our midst, makes my life and ministry possible.

As we prepare to move together into God's future, I want to invite you to join with me in honouring and giving thanks for disciples in our midst whose ministry and witness in their local parish and beyond has been exemplary, and who stand as symbols of God's abundant grace at work in us. I am delighted to announce that Susan Roe-Finlay and Bernie Beare will be admitted as members of the Order of Rupert's Land; and the Rev. Dr. Cathy Campbell, the Rev. Norman Collier and the Rev. Geoff Woodcroft will be admitted as Canons of St. John's Cathedral Chapter. We will recognize these persons in prayer and commissioning later in this service.

You may have noticed in your service bulletin this evening a kind of bookmark that looks like a *tent peg*. Yes – it is a tent peg. Let me explain why it's there. In my time in our Diocese, we began our first diocesan strategic initiative leading up to and during the 2004 Synod. A Diocesan Strategic Planning Team, with an external facilitator, led the Synod through a process that produced an Identity and a Mission Statement. While not perfect, these statements represented a high degree of consensus and help us understand who we are and what is important in our work. This effort helped to prepare us to be one of the first four pilot projects in the General Synod's holistic stewardship initiative entitled "Letting Down the Nets." An intensive consultation with diocesan leadership and visitors from General Synod produced a Ministry and Mission audit. The audit showed us that we had five key issues to work on before we would be ready to *move forward* in a concerted way. Two of these we have addressed: completion of the Responding in Love campaign, and the implementation of an agreed-upon Apportionment formula. For the other three issues we have achieved only minimal resolution: the perception of a lack of strategic action plans in the diocese; lack of trust in the areas of accountability and transparency in parishes and Diocese; and a lack of understanding and appreciation of the role of the Diocese.

In order to address these issues, especially the lack of strategic action plans, I appointed the Diocesan Action Planning Group to spearhead the development of a 3-year Diocesan Action Plan – with strategic directions, clear priorities, action plans and time lines and with built-in accountability. Much consultation took place throughout the Diocese, receiving feedback on each of three drafts. The final version, entitled *The Way Forward*, was adopted in 2006 as the Action Plan for our Diocese for the next three to five years. You may be surprised to learn that we have actually made considerable progress in the "Five Pillars" of *The Way Forward*. The first was helping parishes to be active and energized mission centres. A quick survey of a considerable number of parishes would reveal growth in mindset and projects in the last 5 years to help embrace the community in which they live. The second pillar had to do with building and modelling a more interdependent diocesan community. There has been significant growth in the sharing of resources – adult education, music and liturgy, Lenten programs, etc. -

across parish boundaries and between congregations. The third pillar dealt with empowering lay and clergy leaders in an ever-changing environment. During this period, the use of Intentional Interim Ministry between incumbencies has become well-established with, by and large, excellent effect. This is coupled with the Fresh Start program which newly-appointed Incumbents and their lay leadership are involved in for one, and in many cases, two years. Both of these efforts build long-term health into our parish ministries across the Diocese. The fourth pillar encouraged nurture and support for individuals and families for learning and living the Gospel. The emergence of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd program at the local level, with training supported by the Diocese, and the themes and structure of our Faith Horizons gatherings have responded in a significant way to this need. The fifth pillar dealing with the examination and reallocation of resources to where Christ's mission calls us, has also received considerable attention. A New Church Development Fund has helped to support a pilot ministry in the southwest area of Winnipeg and continues to hold in excess of \$800,000; four parishes in the western portion of Winnipeg have shared programs and worship events; five parishes in the north part of Winnipeg explored options for a couple of years and from this work, three parishes (St. Martin, St. Anne and St. Barnabas) are joining together in the Trinity Anglican Ministry and working toward becoming one parish.

We have actually made laudable progress with The Way Forward. The problem lies in the fact that we have not communicated the work, nor have we "joined the dots" and helped members of the Diocese realize the overall significance of what we're doing together. However, some of us are also left with the impression that much is the same as it was six years ago – and there is some truth to that. While Synod passed resolutions to try and move this work forward, there simply wasn't the focus or the will to make it happen. We seemed to be "stuck" as a Diocese and primarily focused on the challenges in our local parishes.

Realizing the need to bring all of us together, and to help become focussed on our common life, with the counsel and support of the Executive Committee, I appointed a small task force in 2009 to undertake the "Vitality and Viability" study with parishes. This represented a huge amount of work for this group, but they helpfully and successfully implemented a strongly consultative process which offered parishes a great deal of input on both process and content. We can all take satisfaction in the fact that V & V 1 was completed "on time and on budget" as the commercial world likes to say. Naturally, some of us reacted to the information we received – but that was completely understandable and acceptable. The primary idea was to motivate parishes in a constructive way, to take their own vitality and viability seriously. There is no doubt that some of the inter-parish cooperation in the last few years is a direct result of this initiative. Vitality & Viability 2, on which we'll be receiving a report, is ongoing but suffers from a lack of available personnel to carry out the local consultation that's necessary. However, its intent of *configuring our congregations, structures and processes so that the worship,*

ministry and mission activities in this diocese are faithful and flourishing is still an accurate and vital goal. In addition, the 2010 Synod recognized the value in the V & V process, and commissioned Vitality & Viability 1.1 – a process to help analyze the vitality and viability of the leadership structures of the Diocese. We owe a vote of thanks to Simon Blaikie and Jane Barter-Moulaison who persevered through slow responses and difficult meeting schedules to complete this work – again “on time and on budget.” Much of the value of that work is being passed on directly to the structures themselves. One thing that was uncovered, for which we can all take some pride, is that our structures are energized by many people from across the Diocese who care deeply about this ministry and work well and effectively together.

A recent and very significant work has been the Diocesan Feasibility Study which Diocesan Executive and Council authorized earlier this year. The primary focus of this Study was to help us discern if now was the time for our Diocese to engage in a capital financial program. As you will have read in the Report, we are not ready to begin such an effort at this time. More importantly, though, the Report exposed clearly, and to some degree, painfully, our Vitality and Viability as a Church. As a sweeping generalization of the findings, the report said, “You’re not going anywhere!” And if we look back at the Ministry and Mission audit of six years ago, we are suffering from some of the same problems – which from a read of Rupert’s Land history – have dogged us for decades.

So it’s time to change that! Some of us, in our local parishes, might *think* we’re going somewhere locally. But it’s a little like being on a point in a revolving circle. There is the perception of movement as the circle rotates, but in reality no one is really going anywhere!

This is where the tent peg comes in. Probably most of us are at least somewhat familiar with the story of the Exodus from the Old Testament. God calls Moses, Miriam and Aaron to lead Israel out of Egypt to Mount Sinai where they receive the Law and begin to become God’s People in the wilderness. They will eventually be led to God’s Promised Land, but in the meantime a lot of attitudinal change and transformation has to take place as the people learn to trust God, trust their leadership, and ultimately, trust themselves as belonging to God. Much of the period of the “wilderness wanderings” is recorded in the Book of Numbers. A continuing theme in the account is the fact that the people took their cue from God’s “cloud by day and fire by night.” In Numbers chapter 9 we read, “Whenever the cloud lifted from over the tent (or tabernacle) then the Israelites would set out; and in the place where the cloud settled down, there the Israelites would camp ... At the command of the Lord the Israelites would camp, and at the command of the Lord they would set out. They kept the charge of the Lord, at the command of the Lord by Moses.” (Num. 9:17, 23)

It is time for us to “break camp” – to pull up the tent pegs – and to set out. Much of the last several years have been spent helping us understand who we are, helping us to work together

better, helping us to trust one another more. We have a lot more growing to do together, but we can't do any more of it by staying in this camp. If we stay here we will slowly wither. It is time to drink from the Wellspring and, as we do that, to move out together – to be refreshed, renewed and reborn.

In some sense, God's Word for us tonight helps give us vision and the assurance of what lies ahead. The First Reading from Ezekiel (Ezekiel 47: 1-12) comes from the portion of the book that describes an apocalyptic vision of the New Temple – the ultimate gathering place of God's People with the Holy One. These kinds of visions are sometimes difficult for us to interpret a few thousand years later and in a very different world. But we can learn from the narrative if we simply let it speak to us in our context. It is clearly a vision of the Temple of God supplying life-giving nourishment to all of creation. "Wherever the river goes, every living creature that swarms will live, and there will be very many fish ... On the banks, on both sides of the river, there will grow all kinds of trees for food ... Their fruit will be for food, and their leaves for healing." (Ezek. 47: 7, 12) But notice that, while the vision begins at the Temple, the focus is outward into the world. The further Ezekiel goes out into the world, the *deeper*, the river becomes. There is a message for us in this. There is no question that the source of our Wellspring is the Temple of God, but the focus of its fruitfulness is out in the world. It is for God's world that the living water is sent – and sent with us!

The Second Reading from Revelation (Revelation 22: 1-6), while written hundreds of years later, contains a surprisingly similar vision. Once again it is a vision of God's home – God's place – but now it is portrayed as a City and once again the river is the source of life for trees that yield abundant fruit continuously. All of the city's residents carry God's name on their foreheads (meaning that they know and are known by God) and they all see God and bask in God's light continuously.

But it is the Gospel reading (John 7: 37-39) that brings these visions of the fulfillment of God's reign into focus and reality for us. Jesus shouts out an invitation at a festival he is attending. He tells the "thirsty" to come, and invites the one who believes to "drink." But he goes on to say, "As the scripture has said, 'Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water.'" (John 7:38) It is a clear allusion to the visions in Ezekiel and in Zechariah, except that the author explains that because God will dwell in the hearts of Jesus' disciples when they receive the Holy Spirit, the "Temple" of God will be inside the believer. St. Paul affirms this same understanding in his admonishment to the misbehaving Corinthians when he says, "Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God?" (1 Cor. 6:19)

I think most of us understand that Jesus is the Wellspring from which we are to receive God's "living water." And I think we grasp that coming to drink of that water is essential to our being able to live as God wants us to live. But the absolutely essential piece we haven't picked up on

– is that we are to be “God’s river” into the world! Instead, as parishes, and together as a Diocese, we have focussed on nourishing ourselves as best we can, on inviting any passers-by that come along into our camp so that they too can receive the Living Water. And we have been increasingly diligent about making sure that ALL are welcome in God’s camp – working hard at overcoming our own prejudices, and trying to draw the circle ever wider for those we welcome into the camp. The problem is - we’re not supposed to *remain* in the camp. God calls us to camp temporarily in various “places” or stages in our development so that we can become better equipped – for the journey.

Tonight you have received a tent peg (which can double as a book-mark) to remind you that we have “broken camp.” Tomorrow morning, on your Synod table, you will receive a *water bottle* to remind you that you need to continually drink of the living water from the Wellspring. But you are not being given a tea cup, to be washed up and put back in the campground cupboard! You are receiving a water bottle to take with you on our journey and to share with every “thirsty” person God brings across our path.

First and foremost, we are *disciples* of Jesus Christ. Disciples, by definition, *follow* the One whose discipleship they are exercising. And it is becoming increasingly clear that Jesus is leaving the gathered Church. It is not that he is no longer present in the Church – but rather that increasingly Christ is calling us out of our buildings and into the world he came to save. If we remain in this “camp” and keep trying to practice our discipleship, we will not live.

Over the next two years, we have a lot of growing, experimenting and discerning to do in order to discover what God wants us to be, and to be involved in, as we journey together in God’s world. But immediately, we have to take very seriously “who we are” and “who we are together.” Every disciple and every parish has something to contribute to this journey – but if we try and walk apart, either as individuals or as parishes, we will end up walking in circles. Only together can we fulfill God’s call because God has formed us together into this entity called Rupert’s Land.

Our immediate focus needs to be on discipleship – ours and those around us. Many of us already know that it is only Christ who truly calls disciples. Our purpose is to help people discern that calling, to welcome them as they do, to support them in their response, and to walk together with them in God’s world. I am charging our Diocese to embrace this work and to fulfill it in this way over the next two years: **discover disciples - develop disciples - deploy disciples**. Let me briefly explain. As we share God’s love and truth in action and in word in our daily lives; as we live out the 5 (or soon to become 6) Marks of Mission; we will *discover* persons around us who, even if we weren’t aware of it, are becoming Jesus’ disciples too. In some cases we will be able to help them in that discovery, and rejoice with them as they accept God’s love for them in Christ. As the community of Christian disciples, the Church, we are

entrusted to *develop* disciples - including ourselves - helping us to embrace more fully and more deeply the love and truth of God, and God's purposes for the world. As was obvious to the disciples on the Day of Pentecost, we are to be *deployed* in God's world – not bound up in a base camp. We are to be sent, and we need to help each other be sent, into God's world - taking with us the Living Water, and sharing it freely and abundantly everywhere we can! Our focus on discipleship need to inform everything we are and everything we do.

But what about mission, and the missional Church you may ask? It is only in focusing on discipleship in this way that we can be truly missional. When we embrace the people around us in our communities, our eyes will be opened to discover persons who are becoming Christ's disciples – maybe in very different ways to our own path. When we become intentionally conscientious about developing ourselves and others as disciples, we all become better equipped to engage the world in which we live. When we realize that God's purpose is to deploy us as Christ's disciples in the world, we live our lives with a sense of purpose and expectation – expectation that God's love and power is at work in and through us and the people we encounter.

For the next two years (and maybe beyond) **discipleship** understood as discovery, development and deployment (the 3 "Ds") is to be our over-arching focus. It is not yet a strategic plan, but it will help begin to move us in that direction. The first step will be for every parish, between now and Easter 2013, to examine its present practices, explore its opportunities and report to the rest of us "what might benefit other parishes", as well as "the areas in which you need help and support." This step has an inward but essential focus. Alongside this, every parish needs to look beyond its own congregation to the community in which it lives – to get to know, and to get known by, that community. In one year's time, the fall of 2013, every parish is to share their experience of moving beyond their community, in a "mission report" – perhaps this could become part of Faith Horizons 2013. And, in the Diocese as a whole, we need to intentionally support the "3-Ds" of discipleship in Indigenous ministries; local Sudanese ministries, and the ministries of our Church beyond the Winnipeg Perimeter. The reporting-back is a very necessary step – it holds us accountable to one another – but in the most positive way, in that we care enough about each other to want to listen to another's "account" of their ministry and mission. This discipline will help build strength, stamina and creativity in this journey.

When Israel was journeying toward God's Promised Land they would frequently send out scouts or spies to learn everything they could about the places they were passing through, and how to live effectively in those contexts. I am calling on all lay and clergy leadership to become engaged in intentional *learning* about God's mission in the world today – whether through reading, watching webinars, participating in workshops or attending conferences – and I will do all I can to assist you in those ventures. Wardens and Vestries can decide to study or attend training together. I know of at least one priest who engages his Vestry in a relevant book study

to strengthen their leadership of the parish and its mission. Once again, for the sake of positive accountability, I am asking that opportunities be created for members to share their learning in their local deaneries. Perhaps District Deans need to be convening periodic meetings of both the lay and clerical members of the Deanery for precisely this purpose. And I am calling on the Dean, Archdeacons and District Deans, along with myself and additional lay leadership, and the support of Diocesan Council, to facilitate a consultation throughout the Diocese that will result in the bringing forward of a Ministry and Mission Plan to the 2014 Synod – including short and long range objectives and action plans. This Plan will need to galvanize us – in our diversity and our unity – so that the contribution of every congregation, and in fact, of every disciple – helps to contribute to the strength and vitality of the whole and every one of its parts.

Am I convinced that this Diocese can actually do this? Absolutely! Why should this time be different? The simple answer is – because it IS different. We have been challenged by our Vitality and Viability work, and the recent Feasibility Study, to become much more than we see ourselves to be. And the last part of that statement will be our only real stumbling block – “who we see ourselves to be.” If we fall back into the old ways of cynicism and mistrust, and of ultimately not having faith in what God is doing in us, then we will never leave this “camp” – we will never move forward together. But I believe we have been given a new opportunity and that we’re ready to seize it. At the end of September, we gathered the Diocesan Clergy together and invited each member to contribute what they believed is the single most important thing we need to be about to strengthen the Church in this Diocese. There was a good and helpful diversity in the responses, but there was also an underlying unity, and most importantly there is a strong desire to collaborate – to work together to build a new future for God’s Church in this Diocese. When Israel left Egypt and began to journey with God toward the Promised Land, they had to leave things behind – especially their self-image as being nothing but a bunch of slaves. As we “break camp” we will have to leave behind the discouragement, disappointments, and low expectations of the past – forever!

We have been called to be Christ’s disciples and together to follow him in the world - in a life of discipleship - to discover, develop and deploy disciples who witness to God’s eternal love for the whole of creation. We have received the inviting words, “Let the one who believes in Jesus come and drink”, for “out of the believer’s heart shall flow rivers of living water.” There is a world out there ... and a Church in here ... just waiting to be refreshed, renewed and reborn. AMEN.