

*Bishop's Address*  
*to the 113<sup>th</sup> Session of the Synod of*  
*The Diocese of Rupert's Land*  
*October 20, 2016*

We begin this gathering of Synod, thankful for this land, given by the Creator, on which we live and prosper; thankful for the indigenous Peoples, the First Nations who welcomed the settlers over the past few centuries, and thankful for the grace of God which has called these amazingly diverse peoples together, as disciples of Jesus Christ and members of this one Body - into this Church we call Rupert's Land. And we remember our fellow disciples who, since we last met together in this Synod, have died and gone on to a closer communion with our Lord.

We gather also conscious of what is taking place in the local and global world around us – in particular the tragic plight of millions of refugees and the senseless destruction of persons and property in Syria; the ongoing struggle to fully embrace those labelled as minorities in our midst – especially the First Peoples of this land and also the LGBTQ2 community; and the journey toward the American federal elections next month only too aware of the impact it may have on us and throughout the world.

We gather with thanksgiving for those from far away and those nearby whom we are delighted to recognize as “family.” For almost two weeks we have been blessed with senior leadership from our Companion Diocese of Central Buganda, Uganda. With us for this Synod are the Rt. Rev. Jackson Matovu and his spouse, Perusi Matovu, Bishop-elect Michael Lubowa and his spouse Janepher Lubowa, and Archdeacon Jason Musoke and his spouse, Faith Musoke. For many years we have been sharing in ministry and mission with the Manitoba Northwestern Ontario Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, and for over three years we have shared a Synod Office building and a rich partnership in ministry, mission and fellowship. Unfortunately Bishop Elaine Sauer is not able to be with us this evening but will join us for Friday morning's session. Just in the past few months our two churches have joined together in Christ to embrace the world in our local neighbourhoods in a bold project entitled ALIGN – Anglican and Lutherans in God's Neighbourhoods. And finally, our diocesan family continues to be enriched and redefined by the presence of the parishes in Manitoba and Ontario who became part of Rupert's Land in August, 2014.

As disciples of Jesus Christ, our fundamental attitude toward the gift of life is to be one of *thankfulness*. First of all, I want to give thanks for all of you who represent the faith communities of Rupert's Land. *You* are what makes this diocesan family a living reality. I want to express my deep appreciation and affection for those with whom I have the privilege of serving on a regular basis: initially Karen Terlinski who was succeeded by our newest member, Elaine Kienlen, since May 1, the Rev. Vincent Solomon, Judy McIvor, Bernice Funk and the indefatigable Susan Suppes – along with Gloria Romaniuk, our Archivist and her volunteers, as well as Allison Courey of the Rupert's Land News who is now preparing to hand over this ministry to her successor. I am also delighted to share in ministry on a daily basis with our Lutheran partners: Bishop Elaine Sauer, Pastor Larry Ulrich, Debbie Beyer, Rick Scherger, Tyler Gingrich – and for a time, Lisa Janke.

I want to give thanks for the sacrificial ministry of our Archdeacons and their parishes who support them: Godfrey Maweje and St. Clement's, Mapleton and St. George's, Wakefield, Jennifer Sisson and Good Shepherd and Spirit Path, Winnipeg, James Bardsley and Church of the Ascension, Stonewall, James Dugan and St. Alban's Cathedral, Kenora, and more recently Simon Blaikie and St. George's, Crescentwood and Geoff Woodcroft and St. Paul's, Fort Garry, as well as our Dean, Paul Johnson and the people of our Cathedral Church of St. John in Winnipeg. These five persons are joined by our six District Deans: John Dolloff, Brad Elliott, Lenise Francis, Helen Kennedy, Paul Lampman and David Widdicombe who, together with me, form the Associates in Episcopal Ministry and bring their many gifts and talents into this shared oversight and support of our ministry and mission. My thanksgiving extends also to all 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. I also want to give thanks for the many of you who, often much less visibly, remember me in prayer, inquire as to my personal well-being, and support and enable my ministry as bishop – particularly my family and especially my spouse Nancy who, in addition to her own ministries in our midst, makes my life and ministry possible. Finally, I want to thank our group of diocesan clergy whose ongoing leadership in pastoral ministry and mission is often taken for granted. As I engage in casual conversations with our clergy, I find myself continually impressed by the creative, conscientious and often-sacrificial ministries which they faithfully offer to us. We are truly blessed as a diocese!

Now I wish to invite you to also join me in honouring and giving thanks for six disciples in our midst whose ministry and witness in several different ways has been exemplary, and who stand as symbols of God's abundant grace at work in our midst. I am delighted to announce that The Rev. Canon Dr. Cathy Campbell, The Rev. Canon Peter Flynn and Mrs. Gail Schnabl will be admitted as members of the Order of Rupert's Land. And The Rev. Bradley Elliott, The Rev. Mary Lysecki and The Rev. Dr. David Widdicombe will be admitted as Canons of St. John's Cathedral Chapter. We will recognize these persons through prayer and commissioning later in this service.

I want to set the balance of this address in the context of both the Scripture readings we've heard this evening, as well as the ministry and mission path we have been following together – particularly these last four years. From this trajectory, I will share a vision of the kind of Church I believe God is calling us to become, and I will offer what will hopefully be a reference frame from which all of us and our faith communities can discern and plan our local ministry and mission to move us toward becoming that kind of Church.

The first reading from Isaiah (43: 15-21) speaks of the promised return of God's People, Israel, from the devastating impact of being taken into exile in foreign countries after being defeated by the Babylonian empire in the sixth century BCE. This return is portrayed like a 'new Exodus.' But those hearing the prophetic words are still captive in Babylon – both physically and spiritually. So the prophet exhorts and encourages them "Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old. I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?" (43: 18, 19) I believe that this Word is for us – for the Christian Church in Canada today. Just like God's People of old, we cannot imagine what this "new thing" will be, nor should we expect it to be a return to the wealthier and more populated church communities of our past. The Israel that emerged after the Exile was also not like the Israel of the monarchy a

few centuries earlier. The prophet tells us that the actions of God will be miraculous – unpredictable – making ‘a way’ in the wilderness and ‘rivers in the desert.’ For we who live in a technological age, these acts do not seem particularly difficult. But we must hear the words the way they were originally intended – ‘a way’ in the wilderness or a ‘river in the desert’ would seem impossible to make happen. The prophet concludes this section by saying that God will do this “to give drink to my chosen people, the people whom I formed for myself” - something the Exiles had all but forgotten. And what would be the result – a restored former Israel? No. But rather that these people formed by God might declare God’s praise! It is the people and their spirits that will be restored so that they might become a symbol of the activity of God to the world. I believe that this is a word for us – here and now. Our faith communities need to equip our members to be able to connect the narrative story of their own lives to the narrative stories they read in Scripture. With this skill, all of us will be able to discern God at work in our daily lives and the common life of our communities, and be ready to both engage and describe that work to the people around us – and thereby “declare God’s praise.” Then *we* become this symbol of the activity of God in the world. Listen even to the words of Psalm 42 in response to the Prophet. The psalmist is grieving the lack of their experience of God – “I thirst for God, for the living God” (Ps. 42:2a) and tells us that “My tears have been my food day and night, while all day long they say to me ‘Where now is your God?’” (Ps. 42:3) Is this not the situation we find ourselves in? While many of our friends and neighbours are more polite and diplomatic, do we not hear them, at least implying, “Where is your God? What difference is your God, your worship, your Church really making in this world?”

Four years ago our Synod theme was “From the Wellspring ... Living Water” and each of us received a symbolic ‘tent peg’ to indicate that we were breaking camp and moving out – leaving behind our old, settled, institutional understanding of church and embarking on a new journey together. This was introduced first and foremost as a journey of *discipleship* described by the three aspects of *discovering*, *developing* and *deploying* discipleship. Two years ago we focussed more intentionally on taking our journey of discipleship into our neighbourhoods and the communities in which we live and described this as becoming *missional communities* of disciples. Now, as we wrestle with this Synod’s theme of Embracing the World With Christ, I believe our journey has brought us to the final foundational piece that we need to take up – and that is *stewardship*. Below you will find a picture of a triangle with Christ in the middle, three foundational pieces at each point of the triangle, and our circular journey of transformation as we grow more deeply into the people Christ is calling us to be.

I have saved the review of the work that has been done over the last two years (much of it described in our Convening Circular) until this point because it reveals that much of that work has been part of discipleship; a somewhat smaller part of missional community; and a few initial pieces that are part of stewardship. The ministry of the Rupert’s Land news, now with more than 700 persons subscribed, is over double the number of the identifiable subscribers for the previous print edition. The Rupert’s Land Indigenous Circle, under the leadership of George Campbell and Sylvia James, has sought to strengthen the discipleship of indigenous persons and communities and to make us aware of, and to support, various projects and sources of learning. As he retires from the Chair, we want to honour George and the contributions he has made to this ministry both within and beyond our local diocese. Alongside this ministry, Wechetowin, under the leadership of Sylvia James and Velma Orvis, has initiated and promoted projects to nurture this discipleship of both indigenous and non-indigenous persons. Helen Kennedy and the

diocesan youth ministry; Diane Guilford and the Anglican Fellowship of Prayer; Sean Carlson and the Companion Diocese Committee; Susan Roe Finlay and Education for Ministry; Lee and Susan Titterington and the Mental Health Working Group, have all been resources to enrich the personal and communal expression of Christian discipleship. Bill Harwood and Brian Ford, with the Diocesan Discernment Group on Ordained Ministry; Cathy Campbell and now Wayne McIntosh and the Diocesan Local Collaborative Ministry Group; Tanis Kolisnyk and the Diocesan Diaconal Ministry Group; our participation in the Living Stones (North American) ministry development partnership; and the in-process Theological Education Commission work, all add greatly to our growth in faithful discipleship. One part of the Christ triangle picture has taken hold amongst the people in our Diocese.

Our Synod 2014 theme of “Discipleship in 3-D” focused upon, and moved us into, our local neighbourhoods and helped us realize that intentional discipleship leads to the formation of missional communities. And some of the work we’ve been doing over the past two years expresses that missional calling. Deacon Maylanne Maybee has spearheaded our Primate’s World Relief and Development Fund ministry and helped us engage in more ways than simply offering financial donations. Gail Schnabl built upon and expanded the long-standing reputation of the Diocese of Rupert’s Land as a Sponsorship Agreement Holder for the refugee ministry. Alongside Gail, Canon Peter Flynn worked for almost two decades with the Manitoba Interfaith Immigration Council. Much more recently, the Rev. Vince Solomon was appointed as our Urban Indigenous Ministry Developer and is helping us walk alongside the indigenous communities in our midst. And very recently, together with our local Lutheran brothers and sisters, we are embarking on a completely new and uncharted path – a ‘way in the wilderness’ and, hopefully, forming a ‘river in the desert’ as we learn, experiment and reflect on what God is doing in our neighbourhoods and how we can join and support that work. This new missional effort we’ve named ALIGN. We have made a good start on this second point of the Christ triangle picture – that of *missional communities*.

At this 2016 Synod, with our theme of “Embracing the World with Christ” we are laying hold of the third point of the triangle - the foundation of stewardship - and defining that as our “*stewardship of God’s grace*.” The transformation that needs to happen in us to embrace stewardship is huge. It involves us being able to see the relationships in our lives, and the “things” in our lives, as gifts from God, and the attitudes and actions we take in each of these two areas as our *stewardship* of those gifts. Even before formally naming this work, we have begun to explore it under the theme of reconciliation. We are learning about and turning away from the Doctrine of Discovery and the underlying racism it attempts to validate, and we are beginning to respond to the 94 Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Report. At this Synod we will be receiving a report on the work done on the 2014 Synod resolution A-2 and will be considering resolutions designed to move us more deeply into the work of reconciliation.

I believe that one of the profound insights that God’s Spirit is showing our Church in this ongoing journey of discipleship, missional community, and stewardship – is that the end goal is not the projects that are accomplished. Those are a means to the end. The end goal is *who* we become as communities of God’s People – and as expressions of those communities in our individual lives. Note the order of that statement. It is not who we are as autonomous individuals that creates the identity of our Church – it is our covenanted relationship with Christ in community with each other which shapes and defines who we are as individual persons. This

is the act of transformation that forms us into “a people that declares God’s praise” – the symbol of God’s activity in the world. So in our second reading tonight from Paul’s letter to the Romans, after he asserts the all-pervasive, God-giveness of life, he turns to us and says, “I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies (your whole beings) as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.” (Romans 12:1) This is the beginning and the end of all discipleship, of all the ministry and mission of the Church, of all the choir practices, Vestry meetings, breakfast programs, confirmation classes, refugee sponsorships, and even General Synod resolutions ... to enable others – all others, and ourselves to present ourselves as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable. This is the only way that we can be transformed on this journey of discipleship as God’s Church.

Then Paul continues to describe the kind of Christian community that makes it possible to continually “present ourselves as living sacrifices” to God. He writes, “so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another.” Note the kind of radical love to which all of us are called! Often, when I read this passage, I immediately paraphrase it as “God loves us all and wants us to get along with each other.” But the Christian faith community of disciples is called to much more. In Paul’s teaching on the Body of Christ, it is clear that we are not called to simply “get along”, or “tolerate” one another. It is clear that we *need* each other in order to actually be the community God calls and needs us to be – for the world! Paul concludes this section with “love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honour.” (Rom 12:10) These are not words of mere tolerance. They are not even words of accepting diversity. They are not passive words. They are the dynamic words of our primary calling as Christians – to actually work at – put effort into – loving each other.

Tonight’s reading from John’s Gospel helps us to see this radical love demonstrated and explained by Jesus and his disciples. After Jesus takes the role of a servant, washes his disciples’ feet and explains what he has done, he concludes with this directive: “you also ought to wash one another’s feet.” (John 13:14b) Again, I’m tempted to paraphrase this as “Jesus wants us to be willing to make some sacrifices for the sake of others around us.” But Jesus calls, equips and expects much more of us. The radical love to which we are called means being willing to move ourselves out of the central focus of our own lives. Instead we are to see ourselves as an integral part of a larger whole alongside those around us, with Jesus Christ at the centre. This is what is so profound about Jesus’ new commandment – ‘to love one another as I have loved you.’ It is not that I am called to do this so I can be a better Christian, or that if I think I am a mature Christian I really ought to be more loving. This call to radical love is at the very centre of God’s saving work in my life! It is integral to my living into the salvation God has given in the person of Jesus Christ. And it is fundamental to the transforming work of God’s People in the world. Jesus concludes this teaching with “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13:35) Clearly, being and acting as a community of radical love must be the litmus test for everything that happens in our Church. This is a community that can be seen to be “declaring God’s praise.”

So how can we see and know that this is the journey of discipleship that we, as the people and faith communities of Rupert’s Land are being called to walk – that this is our trajectory? Let us refer again to the Christ triangle picture. In 2012 we began the journey of intentional discipleship – depicted in the lower left corner of the triangle. At the 2013 Faith Horizons we invited Nadia Bolz-Weber to talk to us about Discipleship: Discovery, Development,

Deployment. She challenged us to move beyond our insider Church-culture and begin to intentionally explore what God was doing in and with the people of our neighbourhoods. We were called to “encounter our neighbourhood.” This bore fruit in our journey together and the focus of our 2014 Synod was becoming Missional Communities. As soon as we began the journey to becoming missional communities, we came face-to-face with the long overdue call to take seriously both what God was doing in contemporary indigenous communities, as well as our need to learn, repent and move toward reconciliation. So in 2015, the theme of Faith Horizons was “All My Relations: An Exploration of Faith, Truth and Reconciliation.” That ongoing walk has offered us both “challenges and opportunities.” And now at our 2016 Synod we have the theme of “Embracing the World with Christ.” And in order to do that, we are being challenged to see ourselves, first and foremost, as *stewards of God’s grace*.

But what does this mean? At this Synod we are considering three resolutions aimed at helping us move more deeply into reconciliation and partnership with the indigenous peoples in our midst. As we engage in this work – non-indigenous and indigenous together – we are working at being good stewards of God’s grace – the gift of God’s peace and wholeness that makes all reconciliation possible. Coming out of the recent meeting of General Synod, when we realized the need to work much harder at responding to Christ’s call of radical love – not just tolerating but actually reaching out to embrace and acknowledge our need of each other and each other’s differences - we are working at being good stewards of God’s grace. When we are honest about the areas and relationships in our parishes and congregations that are bound by fear or mistrust, and choose to seek the perfect love of God that casts out fear, we are working at being good stewards of God’s grace. These are just a few initial examples. I have much to learn about being a good steward of God’s grace in community with you, and we have much to grow into together. May I be bold enough to suggest that the theme for our upcoming Faith Horizons 2017 be something like *Stewardship: Outfitting the discipling community*. For growing more deeply in our understanding and practice of being stewards of God’s grace will “inform and mature” our understanding of what it means to be a disciple of Christ, and will return us back to once again take this journey through discipleship, missional community and stewardship with ever deepening understanding, effectiveness and faithfulness.

Therefore, what kind of Church is God calling us to become – in order to embrace the world with Christ? There is one word that can describe how Jesus came and embraced our world – the word is *grace*. Every word, every action, every challenge of Jesus was designed to show the potential, the possibility, the good purpose of all human lives in God’s world. For us to be communities and people who embrace the world with Christ we need to become *intentional communities of grace*. And this will involve a major shift in our culture. If we are going to be formed into a people that “declares God’s praise” as a symbol of God’s activity in the world; if we are going to have a reply to a skeptical world that asks, “Where is your God?”; if we are to see the relationships and the “things” in our lives as gifts from God; if we are to live out the reality that we really are “members one of another” in our Church called to a radical and dynamic kind of love; then our congregations and the diocese they make up must become intentional communities of grace whose primary purpose is to reveal the potential, the possibility, the good purpose of all human lives and, in fact, of all of creation. Consequently, I am inviting every recognized gathering in our Diocese – Vestries, Councils, Bible studies, Mission groups, Deanery Clericus, Diocesan Council, Associates in Episcopal Ministry, and so on – every circle in which we participate - to spend time developing a culture of grace –

exploring what it means in their context, and taking steps to make it reality so that we can be transformed as we embrace the world with Christ.

I am also inviting all of us to consider making this Christ triangle picture the defining symbol of our active journey of transformation as disciples of Jesus Christ – allowing it to guide our discernment and decisions for the ministry and mission of our congregations.

To return where we began with the “new Exodus” of Isaiah 43 – what will be the result of this journey together? Will it take us back to the attendance statistics of the 1950s? Probably not. Will it cause us to adopt the uniformity of practice and doctrine we thought was characteristic of our Church in the past? Highly unlikely. Instead, through every interaction our people and faith communities have in the neighbourhoods – in the world in which we live, and within our own congregations and diocese, people will experience grace – God’s grace – and all of us will know the embrace of Christ. Amen.

