

Bishop's Address to the 112th Session of the Synod of The Diocese of Rupert's Land
October 16, 2014

Let us pray. Eternal God, the One who continually sends your love, power and truth throughout our world; through prophets and sages, through willing women, men and children, and most perfectly through your only Son Jesus, your living Word; prepare us to be bearers of your Word empowered by your Spirit, and send us into this world that you will love forever, opening our eyes to be amazed by what you accomplish in us, and making us ever grateful that you have called each of us by name, in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

We begin this gathering of Synod, thankful for this land, given by the Creator, 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 these amazingly diverse peoples together, as disciples, into this Church we call Rupert's Land. And we remember those fellow disciples who, since we last met together in this Synod, have left our midst and gone on to a closer communion with our Lord.

We are also conscious of what is happening beyond our local communities – in particular the merciless and lethal violence of the ISIS fighters, and the insidious onslaught of the deadly Ebola virus which is spreading, in addition to the disease itself, much fear and despair. We pray for God's deliverance, healing grace, and restorative power for all of creation – and especially for the poor and vulnerable.

Two years ago we gathered at this same time of year in order to “break camp” – to pull up our “tent pegs” – to admit to ourselves and each other that the Spirit of God was leading, if not driving us, out of our familiar, settled way of being Church, and reforming us into the Church we need to become to fulfill our calling in God's mission in the world. We traded in our stationary “camp mugs” for portable water bottles in order to equip us for the journey. We were challenged to embrace a dynamic, moving discipleship in Jesus Christ – not one that merely gazed each week on an empty cross – but one that literally followed the risen Christ into the world in which we live each day. We accepted that we could no longer entrust our identity in Christ to buildings or predictable hierarchical structures, nor could we delegate the ministry and mission of Christ to a few leaders who are paid to be professional disciples on our behalf. Every one of us was charged to embrace a focus on discipleship *together* – using the three lenses of *discovery*, *development*, and *deployment* of ourselves as disciples of Jesus Christ.

In each of the two years since then, Christ has seen fit to bless us with new companions on this journey of discipleship. In 2013, the base of operations for the Manitoba Northwestern Ontario Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, moved in with our central Synod Office operation and we became Anglican Lutheran Centre – with greater strength, greater inspiration and, to our delight, greater humour! In 2014, the congregations of the Southern Region of Keewatin Diocese, discerned Christ's call to bring their gifts and experience in serving Christ and join this “missional expedition” called Rupert's Land. With both of these gifts from God, we have become *more* – in quantity and quality.

Before we turn our attention to the path of this expedition Christ has called and equipped us for, I want to follow the lead of the author of the Letter to the Hebrews who, in Chapter eleven, highlights

the faithful example of those who have lived as God's disciples in our midst. First of all, I 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 honour and express my deep appreciation and affection for those with whom I have the privilege of serving on a regular basis: Cathy Mondor (though, sadly, not much longer), Bernice Funk, Karen Terlinski, and the ever-resilient Susan Suppes who is supporting and guiding her fourth bishop and still going strong – along with Gloria Romaniuk, our conscientious Archivist and her volunteers, as well as Allison Chubb as she recreates the Rupert's Land News. I am also delighted to share in ministry on a daily basis with our Lutheran partners: Bishop Elaine Sauer, Pastor Larry Ulrich, Debbie Beyer, and Rick Scherger.

I depend, in fact all of us depend, on the sacrificial ministry of our Archdeacons and their parishes who support them: Godfrey Mawejje 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, and most recently, James Dugan and St. Alban's Cathedral, Kenora, as well as our Dean, Paul Johnson and the people of our Cathedral Church of St. John in Winnipeg. The three Manitoba Archdeacons made my sabbatical period this past summer possible, by freely offering Commissarial coverage during that time. These five persons are joined by our six District Deans: Simon Blaikie, Brad Elliott, Lenise Francis, Trudy Thorarinson, David Widdicombe and Geoff Woodcroft 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. 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. And just as the author of the Letter to the Hebrews states, "And what more should I say? For time would fail me to tell of ..." after which he recognizes his limits in mentioning the many others who have witnessed to the love and power of God, I, too, am not able lift up all of those who make our ministry possible. However, 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 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. By the grace of God and the long-suffering support of my spouse, I am pleased to share with you that the PhD thesis is finally finished, submitted, and awaiting its oral defence – hopefully before year end.

Now as we prepare to shift our attention from what has been to what God is calling us into, I invite you to join with me in honouring and giving thanks for two 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 us. I am delighted to announce that Donna Cawker and Cathy Mondor will be admitted as members of the Order of Rupert's Land through prayer and commissioning later in this service.

In my Synod Address of 2012, I highlighted the path of discovery and discernment that we had followed for the previous eight or more years – making good progress in some areas and struggling in others. To borrow the biblical garden metaphor of a vine, a lot of the work that we did in the early years was experimental as we worked below the surface at constructing the right system of roots and discerning what we needed in terms of nutrients and soil preparation. The Diocesan Feasibility Study served as a necessary pruning of some of our assumptions about ourselves and our priorities, and the Vitality and Viability principle of 'configuring our congregations, structures and processes so that the

worship, ministry and mission activities of this diocese are faithful and flourishing' we still carry with us as we continue to grow in new and exciting directions.

In that same address to Synod, I charged us to immerse ourselves in the *discovery, development and deployment* of ourselves as disciples of Jesus Christ, stating that within the first year following Synod we were to be prepared to share our explorations into discipleship and by last fall to give a kind of 'mission report' of our experience of moving out into the local community. Toward the end of 2013 I met with each of the deaneries and compiled a thorough listing of our congregations' journey into discipleship. This is summarized in four articles in the Rupert's Land News (February, March, April and May of 2014). After the first introductory article on discipleship, each of the others were framed by an over-arching question: *In what ways are members of your congregation discovering, or discovering more deeply, the call of discipleship in their lives? In what ways are they helping others to discover and respond to Jesus' call of discipleship? In what ways are members of your congregation developing their experience and expression of discipleship – and helping others to do the same? In what ways are members of your congregation intentionally participating in God's mission in the world as disciples of Jesus Christ?* I invite you to revisit these articles to be reminded of the many ways in which discipleship is being practiced by our members.

In the past two years there have been many encouraging new developments in congregations as we equip ourselves for God's missional purpose in our communities. I hope that you will share with each other over our meal and break times some of the things that you have witnessed God accomplishing in and through your congregation. I want to highlight just two of those tonight. The first is the Parish of St. Matthew, Winnipeg, giving birth to the WestEnd Commons. With Primate Fred Hiltz in attendance, we dedicated their new worship space last month and encouraged them in the new ministry and mission God has called them to in their neighbourhood, as they welcome families and individuals to take up residence in newly-built apartments within the walls of the former church building. The second is the coming together of three parishes in the north part of Winnipeg to form one new parish called St. Francis. Through much prayer, sacrifice, creativity and patience, this new parish has let go of some of its property and buildings and currently worships in the building on Burrin Ave. and maintains a ministry centre on McPhillips St. And we should all be encouraged by the increasing openness neighbouring parishes are showing toward collaborating with each other in their ministry and mission – whether or not it results in organic union or consolidation. Another source of encouragement is our continuing partnership with the Manitoba Northwestern Ontario Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada – not only in local shared ministry parishes but also in youth ministry, stewardship and congregational vitality.

Now let's look at what lies before us. Tonight's reading from the Hebrew Scriptures is from the prophet Micah who strongly challenged what he saw as superficial ritualistic practices in 8th century Israel that lacked any deep connection to the peoples' relationship with God or to their daily vocation of living as God's People – God's disciples. Micah dismisses the usual symbols of ritualistic worship as not being ultimately effective without the true offering of ourselves to God. "What does the Lord require of you – but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God." These are not unfamiliar words and our attention is often called to the first two actions – justice and kindness – with the third being treated as simply a call to modesty and humility. I believe that the first two actions are intimately bound up with the third. When we do justice and love kindness, we will be able to walk humbly with our God. And likewise, when we are walking humbly with our God,

we will see the world in such a way that we will hear the call to justice, and our hearts will be motivated to kindness.

In these words, and at this time in the life of our Church and our country, I believe that the Spirit is calling us to be reconciled and healed of the impact of our alienated and broken relationship with the First Peoples of this land – most poignantly demonstrated through our role in the Indian Residential Schools. I had the privilege of being an observer at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s *Dialogue on Reconciliation with traditional knowledge keepers* which took place at the University of Manitoba toward the end of June. Justice Murray Sinclair and the other two TRC Commissioners brought together 14 Knowledge-keepers from across Canada – highly respected senior elders – to dialogue together on the notion of reconciliation. It was a unique gathering because it was not Indigenous leaders speaking to non-Indigenous officials. It was an “insider-conversation” between Indigenous leaders that we were privileged to be able to overhear. It was spread over two days and I have copious notes – but one person’s sharing stood out for me in particular – and that came from the Spiritual Advisor to Justice Murray Sinclair. He spoke at length about the meaning of certain words in his language that might be translated as ‘reconciliation.’ And then he had a word for the Church. Though he is not a Christian, he declared his great respect for Jesus Christ. He said, “I believe that the Church has to reconcile with the Creator, Jesus and the Spirit. They have to reconcile with their God and what they have done.” The words were not spoken in judgement but rather as empathetic counsel – much like the work a therapist might assign to someone she or he is helping to heal. He concluded by saying that, “Reconciliation can’t take place until the Church has done this – and it needs to go beyond the Church to the people of Canada.” Let me be clear – this was not primarily a call for an apology and restitution to the First Peoples of the land – though this is something we are continually called to live into. Rather, if we think of our relationship with Indigenous Canadians as being on a horizontal plane, this is a call to deal with the vertical plane of our relationship with God. I believe that we are carrying a latent, corporate burden as a result of failed and broken relationships – actions and attitudes of which our Church has been a part – that continue to hold us back, and keep us hiding in a defensive posture – not so much unwilling but unable to continue on a healing and reconciling journey in our relationships with these First Canadians. I have already shared this with our last Executive Committee earlier this month, and it is my intention, in consultation with others, to help the members of our diocese engage in this work of repentance, healing and reconciliation so that we will be free to do justice, love kindness, and enjoy walking humbly with our God. This is a burden from our past that we continue to carry and which weighs us down as we attempt to follow Christ into the world and toward God’s re-creation of our world. It is time to shed its weight and lighten our load for this journey.

Two years ago we realized that it was time to “break camp” and move out together on this journey with Christ – to move from being a “settled community” to being a nomadic band of disciples. With this transformation comes a very different paradigm of the Church. When one lives in a settled community, one looks primarily *within* the community for life and purpose. Buildings and structures are put in place to maintain life as it is – expectations form around individuals performing certain roles – success is defined by what groups are able to accomplish or acquire – and defenses are developed to protect what is – to maintain the life we’ve become accustomed to. However, when one joins an expedition – when life is defined as dynamic – always encountering different contexts and unique challenges – everything changes. Now one must look primarily *outward* – beyond the group - for life and purpose. One is dependent on buildings and structures only insofar as they serve

the purpose of the expedition – equipping it to continue faithfully and effectively on its journey. One doesn't devise defences but rather plans offences to engage the people and places in which we find ourselves. And people don't become accustomed to a particular kind of existence – rather what they become accustomed to, and yearn for, are constant, faithful, supportive relationships with their fellow disciples on the journey. And that community of journeying disciples is constantly seeking ways to enrich its life – picking up new sources of strength and vitality along the way – as the need arises.

So with this mental picture in mind of ourselves as a semi-nomadic band of disciples of Jesus Christ called Rupert's Land, now that we are "two years out" on this expedition, what have we learned and what do we need now? At the 2012 Synod we adopted four resolutions that committed all of us to be engaged in and focussed on discipleship. There is easily- demonstrated evidence for the first three of these. However, Resolution A-4 of the 2012 Synod called for the senior leadership of the diocese to consult throughout the Diocese and formulate a Ministry and Mission plan containing both short term goals which we would have already initiated along with some long term objectives and to report this work to the 2014 Synod. If you are thinking of this work along traditional lines, then this resolution has not been fulfilled. However, it hasn't been completed in this way because it would no longer make sense to do so. Using the analogy I laid out a few minutes ago – as a Church we could be described as a "well-settled community" and resolution A-4 was designed to help us plan for the repairs to our infrastructure, or the "new subdivision" we wanted to build – taking into account the many visions and priorities that our members might have about what services might be available in the subdivision – how the streets and buildings should be laid out, and what schools and parks might be built. However, now we're aware that we have broken camp and left that community behind. Therefore, a static plan for permanent structures in the way we're accustomed to planning makes no sense. Instead, the needs, opportunities, and challenges we're facing are completely different because we are "on the move" – constantly equipping ourselves for new and emerging realities. The kind of response to "A-4" that we need now is one that is focussed on *equipping* us – all of us – as individual disciples and as communities of disciples to embrace and respond to the ever-new realities we face in the world.

So here is what we're reporting and bringing forward as a faithful response to Synod 2012 resolution A-4. First of all we are strengthening ministry and theological education. In addition to continuing to develop the Education for Ministry program and the Local Collaborative Ministry Team formation program in our diocese, we have begun to experiment with offering formal theological education in parishes. Local and distance theological colleges have teamed up with parishes to offer what is being called "Ecclesial University" which offers credit courses for those who wish to study theology, and interesting public lectures for those who want a brief immersion into a topic of interest. Another parish is collaborating with St. John's College to re-launch the Bible and Breakfast program (though most of the sessions seem more like Bible and evening dessert to me!), and a Theological Education Commission is working very hard at discerning what members of our Diocese need at various levels and contexts to be effectively equipped in ministry and mission in our current context.

Secondly, a few leaders in the Diocese have begun to call our attention to our need to be healthy and whole, in addition to being formed and educated – and our need to be able to help others move to greater health. There are resolutions coming before us in this Synod dealing with mental health – both strengthening our own and helping others to do the same. Just as many of us become equipped

to administer physical first aid and CPR to those we encounter in need of help, we are being invited to become equipped in “mental health first aid” – both for our sake and for those with whom we live and work.

Thirdly, we are continuing to resource our discipleship. In our previous way of being Church, most of the conversations we had about our faith were with each other. We could use ‘insider language’ and be understood. We could pick up on technical terms like sin, redemption, Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross, the Eucharist and intercessory prayer and the person we were talking with probably understood us. This is no longer true. Now we find ourselves often at a loss when we try and explain to people why we belong to a Church, what the Christian faith is all about, and who is Jesus Christ? But being able to do this is crucial to this journey we find ourselves on with Christ into our world. As a first step, we have purchased and circulated a “theological primer” written by the previous Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, entitled Being Christian which deals with the Baptism, Bible, Eucharist, and Prayer – four of the fundamentals of our life and purpose as Christians. Every parish has been given some copies with the intention that they will discern how best to use and disseminate the text so that all of their members can benefit from its wisdom. We’ll be exploring some of its treasures during the Friday evening session of our Synod.

Finally, and most importantly, we are turning our gaze *outward* – we are allowing the Spirit of God to convert us (turning around is what the word refers to) and transform us into a truly missional Church – the only kind of Church we can be as disciples following the Risen Christ on the journey to establish God’s loving reign in this world.

Tonight’s Gospel reading gives us a powerful example of God’s design for the missional Church. In most Bibles this passage is referred to as “The Mission of the Seventy.” It takes place about mid-way in Luke’s account of Jesus’ ministry. The inner circle of twelve disciples has been called and empowered. There have been some amazing miracles that show that Jesus really is the Messiah – and Luke includes Peter’s declaration to that fact in the preceding chapter. Tonight’s Gospel reading is immediately preceded by a challenging exhortation about people being serious in their discipleship of Christ and not half-hearted. Then Jesus calls together seventy others (presumably in addition to the twelve) and gives them a brief teaching, “marching orders” really, and sends them out – along with the sobering words, “See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves.” (Do you ever feel like that when you’re trying to explain about why your whole life revolves around your faith in Christ – or when you’re trying to advocate for those persons our society would rather forget about?) But then Jesus simply continues to give them their instructions on what they are to do – all of which involves a huge amount of authority and power and requires confidence that God, in fact, will be the One accomplishing these acts that witness to the coming reign of God in the world. The last four verses are fun to read: the seventy come back *amazed* at what they were able to accomplish in the Lord’s name. And Jesus even revels in their accomplishments too – though he closes by reminding them of the ultimate priority – the fact that they belong to God – that they are *beloved*.

This is the Church that you and I are called to be. I am sure that the seventy continued to receive instruction and experiential learning as disciples of Jesus. But clearly, much of their learning takes place *as they engage the world around them in God’s name*. They didn’t all quit their jobs, get Masters of Divinity degrees, and make appointments to see the bishop!

“But what about our declining congregations, the viability of our parish, the lack of young people in our pews, and so on?” At the beginning of this address I spoke of replacing *defences* with a *good offence*. Responding to God’s call as the seventy did is our offence. As we make the missional calling of our discipleship, as individuals and as faith communities, our priority, Christ will take care of our structures. When you are clear about what needs to happen and what you need to do, then transforming our structures to make that happen isn’t a problem. God will re-form us into the shape we need to become.

One last thing – when the seventy went out on their missional expedition they had no idea who could come across their path or to whom they might end up ministering. And I suspect that the Spirit brought along some unexpected people – maybe even folks about which the seventy had some serious doubts about their suitability to receive God’s grace. In tonight’s second reading, Peter and the little band of “proper disciples” he brought with him had that kind of experience with the Gentiles to whom he was preaching – folks that he would have considered to be outside of fellowship with God. To his surprise, if even not initially to his disbelief, the Holy Spirit came upon those Gentiles with the same grace and power that the Spirit had come up on them. Peter reached in the inevitable conclusion that, “If God fills them with the Holy Spirit just as much as us, then they have become us – they are as much God’s children and disciples of Jesus as we are.” We, too, have to go into our communities with the same openness – ready to have our preconceived notions about who might be eligible to respond to God’s grace challenged, stretched and transformed.

That is a 3-D picture of Christ’s call for the disciples of Rupert’s Land as I see it at this time. We’ll have the opportunity to explore, enrich and interpret that call in a presentation tomorrow morning around becoming missional communities. Remember that Christ looked after the seventy very well – He knew what he was doing with them. He knows what he is doing with us. Rejoice that your names are written in heaven too, and prepare over these next few days to move out together – following Christ and ready to be amazed at what God does with us. AMEN.