

*The Right Reverend Donald D. Phillips*

*Bishop's Address*

*to the 116<sup>th</sup> Session of the Synod of*

*The Diocese of Rupert's Land*

*October 11, 2018*

We begin this Synod, thankful for the gift of 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 all of us 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.

At this Synod we are confronted by, and are responding to, our call to be "Together in a Jesus-shaped life."

In this evening's Collect Prayer we are reminded that the Church – our Church - is "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Jesus Christ being the chief cornerstone."

And looking forward we prayed, "Join us together in unity of spirit by their teaching, that we may become a holy temple, acceptable to you."

Being "together" in this way is not a description of a static structure – like the way in which the walls of the Cathedral are put together with this massive roof structure overhead. Being together is a *dynamic* reality of relationships and ministries. "Together" doesn't happen by accident. We didn't just happen to wander into the Cathedral this evening. And even though we were summoned to this gathering by a formal announcement, that proclamation would be meaningless if we had not already been called together in the church we call the Diocese of Rupert's Land. In this evening's reading from Isaiah we heard God reaffirm to God's people, "I am the Lord, I have called you in righteousness, I have taken you by the hand and kept you." Likewise, the Spirit of God has called all of us (and those we represent) to be together in this Church. This "coming together" is only half of the call. God's word also says, "I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations." This Church, this "togetherness", is also called to "go together"; to be immersed in the world – together; to witness to the love and truth of Jesus Christ – together!

I want to devote this first section of the Address to reminding us just "who we are" as this group who are called to be together in a Jesus-shaped life. Though separated by thousands of kilometres, we have come together with the Diocese of Central Buganda, in Uganda, Africa, for over twenty years. We give thanks for their new leadership – Bishop Michael Lubowa and his spouse, Janepher, along with Canon Jason Musoke and his spouse, Faith, who sacrificially devote themselves to care for orphaned children – 138 of whom we directly provide for their support. We have been formally together with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, through the Manitoba Northwestern Ontario Synod, since 2001, with whom we now share a Synod office, priests and deacons, and several ministry initiatives. We will be hearing more about Anglicans and Lutherans in God's neighbourhoods (ALIGN) in this Synod gathering.

I want to express my deep appreciation and affection for those with whom I have the privilege of serving on a regular basis: Nancy Brennan, the Rev. Vincent Solomon, the Rev. Heather McCance, Judy McIvor, Bernice Funk and particularly my Executive Assistant, Susan Suppes – along with Gloria

Romaniuk, our Archivist and her volunteers, as well as Kyla Neufeld, Editor of the Rupert's Land News. I am also delighted to share in ministry on a daily basis with our Lutheran partners: until recently, Bishop Elaine Sauer, and now Bishop Jason Zinko, Pastor Tyler Gingrich, Debbie Beyer, and Colleen Dacquay.

We all must give thanks for 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, Dave Labdon and St. Aidan's, Winnipeg, James Dugan and St. Alban's Cathedral, Kenora, in addition to 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 – especially those who work tirelessly to host our diocesan gatherings. These persons are joined by our District Deans: John Dolloff, Helen Kennedy, Karen Laldin, Paul Lampman and David Widdicombe. We are also very well-served by the Officers of the Diocese: our Chancellor, Art Braid, Vice-Chancellor, Bob Doyle, Treasurer, Gord Pawling, Registrar, John Deacon and Secretary of Synod, Bob Wedlake. Our 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. I am overwhelmed by the care, concern and interest that was lovingly offered this past year as I recovered from surgery and later from a serious infection. Finally, I want to thank our group of diocesan clergy whose ongoing leadership in pastoral ministry and mission is often taken for granted.

Now I want to invite you to also join 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 our midst. I am delighted to announce that Mrs. Joan Spencer and Professor Christopher Trott will be admitted as members of the Order of Rupert's Land. We will recognize these persons through prayer and commissioning later in this service.

This is something of who we are. Now where, and to what is God calling us “together in a Jesus-shaped life?” Tonight's reading from Isaiah, originally spoken to God's people during a devastating time of exile in a foreign land over 2,500 years ago, included these words:

*I am the Lord, I have called you in righteousness, I have taken you by the hand and kept you; I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations.* [Isaiah 42:6] This expresses the sense of “going together into God's world” – being who we are for the sake of all of those in God's creation. On the surface, this sounds honourable and desirable. But when we hear it expressed in contemporary terms, the message can be much more unsettling. Our Archdeacon for Stewardship Development, Geoff Woodcroft, shared an important piece from a stewardship conference in the Diocese of New Westminster that he attended this past March. The keynote speaker, the Rev. Lucy Price punctuated her message with these words: “*But the Church isn't about you. It is about what God is doing in the world.*” And then exclaimed, just for good measure: “Get over it!”

Ouch! Do you realize how much of our church life is devoted to ourselves? When I'm planning much of my ministry, it is often framed with thoughts of “what is the Church expecting of me? – what will they need and want? – what can the membership currently afford?” and so on. And with the best of intentions, don't those of us in parish leadership continually measure our ministry, mission and program around what the current membership wants to see happen, what will meet their needs and keep them coming? What we've heard tonight is that our Church is not an end unto itself – it is a means to an end – God's end. And while the emphasis on being a *missional church* has certainly awakened us to begin

asking questions about the neighbourhoods in which we're located, how often do we in leadership actually engage the questions, "What is God doing in the world?" and therefore, "What does God need our Church to be?"

Even getting to that question is not easy. It will require a huge shift in our understanding of *what* we are and *to whom* the Church belongs. This will require a huge educational and transformational effort in every congregation in our diocese. Our membership cannot be expected to let go of their personally-invested understanding of church, unless they can be guided to learn and accept that their lives as disciples of Jesus Christ, and the congregation they have been called to come together and be part of, is actually *sent* into the world for God's purposes. We can no longer "hope" that this transformation might occur in our midst. There must be an intentional effort everywhere in our Diocese to help bring about this shift in attitude and expectation. I believe that this is the first piece of work to which we need to attend.

A second piece also involves a re-orientation in our understanding of *who* we are, and what our potential is, as God's Church. For over 18 years, when I lead worship in a congregation on Sunday, you have heard me begin my sermon with words to this effect: after thanking the congregation and its leadership for the faithful ministry and mission they carry out, I make the point that "You do this ministry on behalf of us all. YOU are the Diocese of Rupert's Land here in this community. The "Diocese" isn't somewhere else – it's not in a little office at 935 Nesbitt Bay. You're it!" There are signs for which I am cautiously encouraged that these words are beginning to have some effect, but we have much further to go in realizing that we are actually part of one another – that every congregation is part of both the strengths and the weaknesses of every other congregation. In tonight's reading from the Letter to the Philippians, we heard these words: "*Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others.*" [Philippians 2:4] This applies within a congregation; to a congregation within a Deanery or Archdeaconry; to those whose ministries are diocesan-wide so that they are conscious of individual congregations' needs, and to the Diocese as a whole within the Anglican Church of Canada and the Body of Christ around the world.

I want to expand on this crucial need to be much more intentional about "looking to the interests of others." because there is much in this Synod that is calling us to do just that. For instance, what is the dominant model for parish ministry in our Diocese? Surely it is a single congregation, meeting in its own building, under the leadership of a full-time, seminary-trained priest. Thanks to some helpful research carried out recently by Heather McCance, our Ministry Developer, I've learned that only 35% of our congregations are able to fit into this model! A significant majority of our churches need to offer effective ministry and mission using a different model. So when we are considering canonical amendments to more fully include Local Collaborative Ministry congregations in our corporate life, or other congregations looking at their own adaptation of LCM, we are not "accommodating" a small minority of exceptions. We are opening our understanding and practices to more fully include a substantial number of our congregations. Likewise, when financial resources appear to be scarce – both in parish and diocesan budgets – it is easy to view the work of the Ministry Developer as "desirable" but with questions about whether we can continue to afford this kind of effort. As you can see, the majority of our congregations will need the experience and expertise of a ministry developer as they discern and develop models of ministry that effectively enable them to come together in a Jesus-shaped life with the rest of us.

In the last decade or so, non-Indigenous members of our Church have increasingly become open to "looking at the needs of others" – particularly the Indigenous people in our church and in our communities. The expanding work of our Urban Indigenous Ministry Developer, as well as the Council of Elders, is showing just how important this thrust is – locally, nationally and internationally. At the very least, Indigenous people are saying to the non-Indigenous community, sometimes with a smile on

their faces – “We’re still here. Our numbers are growing. We’re not going anywhere.”, with an implied “Get over it.” And surely we, in the Body of Christ, who have had our eyes opened by the grace of God to see the rich diversity and gifts of all peoples of God’s earth, are beginning to make room for, and seek the wisdom and practices of Indigenous Peoples in our time – learning what we can to strengthen the life of our communities and our Church. What is cryptically referred to as the “B-15 Working Group” (the folks who have worked at moving forward that particular resolution from our 2016 Synod) have prepared a presentation to help us engage in some of that learning at this Synod.

As I mentioned at the beginning of this address, part of who we are as those joined together in a Jesus-shaped life, is being joined in a 20+ year partnership of ministry with the Diocese of Central Buganda. In addition to the Parish-Link program which really puts flesh on this relationship, we have engaged in the Orphans Program and very recently the Kasaka Water project. Sitting on this side of the Atlantic, these can appear to be “admirable charitable projects.” However, when you’re immersed in 138 children who, through no fault of their own, have been stripped of their parents through disease leading to death, and when the children’s extended family is already overwhelmed trying to be a family for their deceased brothers and sisters’ children, the critical reality sinks in. The future of these lives depends on us. We have not promised to provide for all of the orphaned children in that diocese. We have committed to provide for these 138. But not enough of us know about that commitment, and not enough of us have responded. As you will hear during our sessions, we need an immediate and abundant response in order just to meet the existing need.

There are already strong expressions of our Church looking to the needs of others. All one needs to do is read the Sunday bulletin of many of our congregations, or listen to the end-of-service announcement in our congregations – large ones and tiny ones – and you’ll hear about initiatives the members are involved in, and often leading, that are focussed on the needs of others. And there are diocesan-wide ministries that we are often not sufficiently aware of or thankful for. The ALIGN (Anglican/Lutheran) initiative focussed on the nature and challenges in our neighbourhoods to which Simon Blaikie, Larry Ulrich and Melinda Pearce have given tireless leadership is one example. There is the accessibility and care of our Archives provided by Gloria Romaniuk and her volunteers which enables many people from many different places to access important pieces of their life stories. The Diocesan Refugee ministry which has become a very demanding, and sometimes emotionally-draining, ministry which Gail Schnabl and her team faithfully oversees on our behalf. There are the many internal ministries which equip our members so that they can more effectively “look to the needs of others.” I am thinking of Diane Guilford and the Anglican Fellowship of Prayer, Brian Ford and the Diocesan Discernment processes, Tanis Kolisnyk and her tireless devotion to diaconal ministry in our diocese, Wayne McIntosh and his leadership in the Local Collaborative Ministry Group, Susan Roe-Finlay and Education for Ministry, Murray Still and the Elders Circle, Cathy Campbell and now Lynne Spiring-Whitten and our diocese’s revitalized Primate’s World Relief and Development Fund effort, Chris Trott and the resource of St. John’s College, Helen Kennedy and our support of youth ministry, and all of those who chair diocesan committees – particularly Gord Pawling and our Finance Committee. And there are other leaders guiding initiatives that enrich our common life and highlight the needs we are otherwise blind to. None of these persons receives any kind of material compensation – all of them offer their time and talent to help us “look to the needs of others.”

Tonight’s Gospel reading is a section of some of Jesus’ final words to his community of disciples about what needs to be the priority in their lives as he prepares to offer himself as the climax of God’s saving work in the world. He assures them of his never-ending love for them; he tells them to intentionally continue to abide, or live, in his love and he gives them a commandment to make that possible. And even then, the ultimate purpose is to have his joy in us, and that our joy may be complete. And what is the command? To love one another in the way that Jesus loves us. He continues to exhort

them as a reassurance, “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last.” We know from reading the Gospels that sometimes that love of Jesus is warm and reassuring – sometimes it is difficult and challenging. Always it is ultimately life-giving – for us and for those around us. So this is the command and the desire of Jesus that we carry into our lives – in our families, in the Church and in this Synod.

So what about the proposed change to the Anglican Church of Canada’s Marriage Canon? As we have been asked by the General Synod, we will give consideration to this proposed action at this Synod. For some, the possibility of the amendment to allow same-sex couples to married according to our marriage rite is a long-overdue opportunity. For others, it would represent a serious error for our Church in faithfully following the Scriptures and the leading of the Spirit. And for some, it is simply not a weighty issue. I believe, wisely, the primary issue that we will work with at our Synod is discerning how we as the Church in this diocese will continue as a ministering community united in Christ – regardless of the outcome of the decision. And we are not simply trying to minimize or ignore this issue. Rather, I believe we are asking God to show us how to continue to “love one another” to the fullest in and through this journey of discernment.

From the last three regular sessions of Synod we have invited and challenged our congregations to walk together: - in the *discovery, development and deployment* of ourselves as *disciples* of Jesus Christ; in forming *missional communities* that see their purpose as reaching outward into the contexts in which we live and worship; and in doing that to realize and build ourselves up to be *communities of grace*. From our last Synod we came away with the “charge” to intentionally develop within our congregations and our working structures a “culture of grace.” We were even asked to take that exercise to our last Provincial Synod and guide those gathered in building a culture of grace within the Synod gathering.

Bringing all of these strands together:

- we are being called to “let go of the Church as being for ‘us’ – and rather to realize that we will actually be fulfilled as disciples of Jesus Christ by allowing God to shape and send us into the daily life of the world, so the Church can be an agent of God’s loving purposes for our world.
- We are being called to look not to our own interests but to the interests of others – trusting that God knows our needs and that we, too, will be looked after.
- And most deeply and fundamentally, we are called to love one another – always and in all things.

All of these are worthy and desirable aims and attitudes. But how do we put them into action? How do we make them living and real? That, my friends, is a question of *stewardship* – as we introduced in Synod 2016 – being faithful *stewards of God’s grace*. In the immediate future we will be facing the challenge of freeing up the necessary resources of time, talent, and finances that will be required to fulfill the vision that God is calling and equipping us to carry out. It will require us to be good stewards of the decisions we make – balancing the ministry of each of our local churches with the common ministry and mission that supports all of us. Decision-makers in diocesan bodies must be good stewards of the resources entrusted to them to effectively empower ministering communities throughout our diocese. Local church decision-makers must be good stewards of the resources entrusted to them – considering both local needs and the needs of the whole diocese as they dedicate persons’ time, talents and money to God’s mission through the Church.

There are lots of questions: how will we continue to provide priests and deacons throughout our communities? How will we provide training and formation to persons who live long distances from the source of that education? How will we equip our congregations to be able to share the Gospel to younger generations with little knowledge of, or appreciation for, God’s loving purposes for them and their world?

How will we enable our congregations to equip older generations to live out their much-needed wisdom and discipleship in what sometimes feels like a strange new world?

The final verse of our reading from Philippians gives us the hope and courage we need. “For it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and work for God’s good pleasure.” [Philippians 2:13] This has always been true – in the past – in our present – and in the future. It’s just that we easily forget. So in these exciting and energizing times – with new episcopal leadership, with new voices speaking truth in our midst, and with local communities desperately in need of God’s love and peace – believe that God really is at work in you! Remind each other of that truth – at all times and in all places. You will bear fruit that will last – and your joy will be complete! AMEN.