Response to the Bishop’s Charge, 4.5

 ***Introduction, Peter***

On behalf of the 51st Session of the Synod of this diocese, we’re providing a response to Archbishop’s Anne Germond’s Charge. We want to present a brief summary of the Charge, provide a few observations, and then we seek the synod’s permission to introduce motions from the floor, for your consideration, and we hope, adoption.

Archbishop Anne begins with a welcome. As this is the first synod following the onset of the COVID pandemic, she reflects about what it means to be “People of Promise” in our current circumstances. We are, as Ephesians 3: 6 reads, “People of Promise;” sharers of the promise in Christ Jesus. The First Letter of Peter builds on this story, that we have a new birth into a living hope (1: 3), are purified (1: 11), and collectively we are Living Stones (2: 5), a royal priesthood (2: 9), and members of Christ’s flock (5: 2). Jesus Christ is our Cornerstone (2: 6), gloriously risen from the dead (1: 3).

In light of this, we are to discipline ourselves (1: 13); get rid of sins and bad practices (2: 1); bear witness to Christ (2: 12); and be united in spirit (3: 8). We share in Christ’s sufferings (3: 14), and have been healed (2: 24). We are to be good stewards of God’s manifold grace (4: 10), in our relationships with one another (4: 8), our family relationships (3: 7), our parishes (5: 14) and our communities (2: 17).

Even during the recent pandemic, we sought to foster community and outreach. All are welcome here, including our guests, new delegates, newly-ordained deacons and new honourary canons. On behalf of synod, we extend good wishes to our newly-enthroned King, King Charles III, and Queen Camilla.

**People of Promise – Church has a sacramental quality: *Derek***

It is urgent that the church be a sacrament, both standing for and making real Christ's love to the world. Sacramental being is a fulfilment of Jesus' own prayer for his beloved, that they would become nourishing bread for the world. It transforms not only the world but the members of the church itself. This is a process that happens in God's time, whose impact we can expect to feel and manifest visibly.

**Signs of God’s Activity in our Context: *Adrienne***

There are signs of God's Activity all around us. Within the Diocese of Algoma there are signs of growth:

* Congregations are becoming visibly diverse;
* There are new shared ministry agreements with the United Church and the Lutheran Church;
* We've celebrated many confirmations and ordinations,
* Planting of trees as part of the “tree-bilee;”
* We are experiencing a re-emergence of child and youth ministry after years of absence;
* In areas where there have been difficulties in resourcing fulltime one-point incumbencies, we are seeing the birth of regional ministries;
* Throughout Algoma we are witnessing Reconciliation in Action (a new Metis Centre, collaboration with Elders, financial contributions to the Shingwauk Residential School Centre, and plans for an Indigenous Ministry Worker);
* We welcomed Father Michael Lapsley as he spoke to churches about forgiveness;
* The Social Justice committee has been busy raising awareness of many issues affecting our people and communities, including homelessness;
* The diocese has been coming together as a community in continual prayer and support of Ukrainians since the invasion by Russia.

**“Holy Saturday” Church: *Pippa***

The Archbishop speaks of us being a “Holy Saturday Church,” and draws lessons from Bishop Emma Ineson’s book *Failure.* We are a church sitting in that time, after the crucifixion and before the resurrection; a church in waiting and in preparation as we come out of the past 3 years lived under the shadow of Covid 19. We are waiting to see what the shape of the church will be in this new post-pandemic era and we must prepare for the future, if we want to have a vibrant, active and sustainable presence in the years to come.

As a committee, we appreciate the imagery of “Holy Saturday.” Indeed, Holy Saturday is not only lingering too long in “Good Friday,” nor rushing to “Easter Sunday.” As is implied but perhaps not fully stated, Christ’s atonement and resurrection are fully the Church’s story. We are both “there” and “not yet;” adopted children and part of God’s new creation, while always addressing the reality of sin and our full need for on-going re-orientation with the help of Christ’s Spirit.

As the 11th Bishop of Algoma, the Archbishop reflects on her predecessors and the contributions each made to the growth and development of the Diocese, but all with one common goal, that the gospel be proclaimed in every church in every community throughout Algoma. A part of this goal can be seen in the plans and dreams her predecessors each had for the future of the Diocese.

The bishop is the chief pastor of the diocese, and therefore the ministry of the bishop is core to our Anglican heritage and identity. When a diocese no longer has the financial resources to sustain the office of the Bishop, difficult decisions need to be made (such as the decision made by the Diocese of Moosonee some years ago).  We need to plan now to fund episcopal ministry for Algoma.    The continued work and growth of the diocese and plans need to be made to ensure the cost of episcopal ministry be covered in the years to come.

The amount needed to do this is sizable, an estimated $4,000,000, which, wisely and safely invested, will provide the income needed. The Archbishop and the Diocesan Treasurer have taken the first steps to move toward the establishment of a fund to ensure the security of the Office of the Bishop for the future by consulting with the Anglican Foundation of Canada about using the Foundation as an investment platform for the fund, but a great deal of work still needs to be done.

**Emphasis on Christian Formation & Emphasis on Vocations; Raising up Lay Readers: *Thomas & Jane***

We who are chosen, as God’s own people are like living stones building a spiritual house. (1 Peter 2: 5).  We affirm the Archbishop’s focus on formation for all the baptized in Algoma.  From Baptism, we journey through life learning, sharing that knowledge with others, and bringing others into the faith.  We understand that formation happens at all places in in all spaces.

When engaging in hospitality; being a welcoming people, sharing of the Scriptures and joined with others in prayer, we engage in our own congregations but we work from a common base.

Re-storying means getting people to see being a Christian is part of a story, through building relationships. We recognize that Re-Storying the Church aims at a really deep change to re-invigourate parish communities. We realize this is a very big aim, and look forward to learning more.

We concur with the Archbishop that those that are called to ordination in the Church need to be well formed. We acknowledge the substantial challenges in current ministerial formation. We also recognize that they need diocesan support.

The “incubator model” is a way of consciously identifying places which are particularly good at encouraging vocational ministry. We think it’s wise to be strategic about how to foster vocational ministries effectively. We look forward to learning more about how the “incubator model” is lived out in practice.

We are pleased that Algoma has improved its discernment process and that we have an energetic postulancy committee and pastoral chaplains, who support all aspirants and postulants on their journey.

Lay readers are highlighted as being a prominent ministry of presence in parishes and the community at large.  They provide much-needed leadership responsibilities by giving of their generous time and energy.  We strongly support the process of upgrading layreader formation and support. We support the working groups charged with implementing a plan through consultation with bodies such as Thorneloe University.

***Concluding Remarks/ Introduction of the Motion:* *Peter***

Archbishop Anne’s Charge concludes by observing that our orientation needs to be toward counter-cultural openness. That invites us, synod delegates, and the parishes and ministries we represent, to consider how we can build our parishes and our ministries to be strong and effective living stones, witnesses of God’s mercy and grace in Jesus Christ. Our orientation is not only to be *inward*, in our care for one another, but *outward*, to be bold and confident witnesses in a skeptical and troubled world, ministering within this world, and contributing to the coming reign of the Living God.

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Motion #1

Motion: Jane Templeton

Second: Adrienne Davis

That every parish in the diocese be expected:

* to identify at least one area of formation or education which needs to be further developed in the congregation(s), bearing in mind the Archbishop’s Charge
* for the parish ordained and lay leadership to take concrete steps to address the area(s) of development
* and to report to their Deaneries and to the diocesan office the step(s) they have already taken (or are committed to taking before the next diocesan synod); and that this reporting process on progress be undertaken no later than the next regular parish Vestry meetings in early 2024.

Motion #2

Mover: Philippa Howard

Second: Thomas Ferris

Second, in her charge, Archbishop Anne identified the establishment of The Episcopal Fund, for permanent, secure funding of the bishop’s ministry in Algoma. As already outlined, this is a significant $4 000 000 commitment, although we are already approaching 23% of this goal. As observed in the Archbishop’s Charge, the planning and decisions regarding this fund ought not to rest with the Archbishop and the Diocesan Treasurer alone, and so we respectfully move the consideration of this motion:

That an Episcopal Fund Committee be established, consisting of at least one member from each deanery, to begin the work of resourcing a secure financial future of the episcopacy in Algoma.

Motion #3

Mover: Derek Neal

Seconder: Peter Armstrong

We strongly encourage that every parish set aside a minimum of .1% of their annual budgets to support layreaders between 2024-2029.

Motion #4

Mover: Adrienne Davis

Seconder: Thomas Ferris

Bearing in mind the “Communion Forest,” we ask that each deanery provide some education about the Christian stewardship of creation; and that each parish undertake at least one initiative, before the next diocesan synod.

Information about the Motions

(included in the Response to the Archbishop’s Charge,

Diocese of Algoma Synod 2023)

Archbishop Anne Germond presented a wide-ranging Charge – a kind of address – at the recent diocesan synod. As is the custom, several members of synod produced a Response near the end of the synod gathering.

Four motions, arising from the Archbishop’s Charge, were presented to and adopted by synod. All four motions require action; three motions require action from parishes and deaneries. This document is intended to provide some explanation about the motions, and to offer some practical guidance about how these motions can best be implemented.

For those who want to read the Archbishop’s Charge, please go to:

<https://www.dioceseofalgoma.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Bishops-Charge-different-formatting-2023.pdf>

The Lambeth Conferences are an international gathering of Anglican bishops, held every ten years or so – most recently, this past summer. For parishes which want to read the “Lambeth Calls,” which were circulated at the end of the last Lambeth Conference, please go to: <https://www.lambethconference.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Lambeth-Calls-July-2022.pdf>

Motion #1

That every parish in the diocese be expected:

* to identify at least one area of formation or education which needs to be further developed in the congregation(s), bearing in mind the Archbishop’s Charge
* for the parish ordained and lay leadership to take concrete steps to address the area(s) of development
* and to report to their Deaneries and to the diocesan office the step(s) they have already taken (or are committed to taking before the next diocesan synod); and that this reporting process on progress be undertaken no later than the next regular parish Vestry meetings in early 2024.

Comments about Motion #1

Education in a broad sense, and Anglican Christian Formation, are key themes in Archbishop Anne’s Charge. These include:

* All the baptized
* Youth
* Layreaders
* Candidates for Holy Orders.

As well as the general education and formation for all Christians, the ministry of Layreaders needs to be encouraged. As well, it’s appropriate that we encourage and show appreciation for one another – including the ministry of Layreaders.

For those of us who are called by God out of our lay ministries into Holy Orders (as deacons, priests, or bishops), this calling needs to be tested by the Church, and there are significant educational and formational requirements before ordination.

The purpose of Motion #1 is to support Archbishop’s Anne’s call to synod that we further develop the **education and formation** which already takes place in this diocese. Each parish – lay leaders and ordained leaders talking together -- is asked to identify at least one area in which we believe we need to learn and develop more.

*What is “Formation?”*

Formation of all Anglican Christians develops as we participate in our parish communities. Some of this formation is *explicit* – such as when we receive teaching in baptismal preparation and confirmation preparation; when we hear sermons or participate in parish or deanery workshops. Some Christian formation is *implicit* – when we learn how the liturgies are celebrated in our parishes and participate in them, when we are engaged in ministry and mission, and when we learn “this is the way we do things around here” in countless small ways.

We are not “done” at Baptism or Confirmation. We are encouraged to continue to grow more deeply as disciples of Jesus, throughout our lives.

The mover of the synod motion included these remarks:

We encourage all parish leaders to bear in mind the broad priorities of the “Lambeth Calls” (from the worldwide Lambeth Conference 2022) – from the Communion Forest to Reconciliation to positive Christian witness, *etc*.

That is, some aspect of the “Lambeth Calls” can help encourage us to choose some area of education and formation.

The diocesan office will not tell parishes what this area of growth must be; deanery officials will not tell parishes what this area of growth must be. We believe that each Christian carries the Holy Spirit, and in thoughtful conversation and discernment, every parish can identify some way(s) to learn more or develop more.

We hope that parishes will not see this as one more task or project, when we are already quite busy. Instead, we hope that parishes in the diocese will see their goals – whatever they are -- as opportunities for fellowship, fun, and growth.

 *Appropriate Goal(s)*

Understandably, we want our goals to be realistic, and something we can see and tell others about. An obvious example of an unrealistic goal would be, “We will fund-raise 3 trillion dollars by this coming Tuesday, to establish a world-class theological college in our parish hall.” An example of an unsuitable goal would be, “We like the Bible (but aren’t going to talk to each other about it, or read it).” That goal is too vague, as we can’t see or tell others what difference our goal makes.

Every parish is expected to come up with at least one goal, by the end of the annual Vestry meetings in early 2024. We can establish our goal(s) *earlier*, but we can’t leave it – or them -- *later*. Once we have our goal, we are all expected to work toward our goals, by no later than the next diocesan synod in mid-2025. As well, each one of us needs to report about our progress, in our deaneries, and to the diocesan office. This is a way to help one another be accountable, so that we don’t forget about this motion.

The Response Committee knows that some parishes are larger than others:

We observe that different parishes have different capacities. Parishes may cooperate with one another, or work within their Deanery as a whole, to foster these developments, so long as there is appropriate discernment within each parish context of the area of formation or education to be addressed, and that the impact of these initiatives can be observed and experienced within the parishes.

This motion is intended to provide great latitude for parishes to self-discern how best to carry out these priorities in their own contexts, but also to ensure that we are accountable to one another for there to be significant, measurable development throughout the diocese. References to the Lambeth Calls also helps provide the Archbishop [with] feedback from parishes, which she and other bishops have been asked to receive.

Motion #2

That an Episcopal Fund Committee be established, consisting of at least one member from each deanery, to begin the work of resourcing a secure financial future of the episcopacy in Algoma.

Comments about Motion #2

In her charge, Archbishop Anne identified the establishment of The Episcopal Fund, for permanent, secure funding of the bishop’s ministry in Algoma. This is a significant $4 000 000 commitment, although we are already approaching 23% of this goal. As observed in the Archbishop’s Charge, the planning and decisions regarding this fund ought not to rest with the Archbishop and the Diocesan Treasurer alone.

We hope that people with expertise in this field, and a willingness to help, will contact the diocesan office. We expect that the exact composition of the Episcopal Fund Committee will be determined by the Archbishop and the Diocesan Treasurer.

Under God, we trust that people will contribute to the Episcopal Fund, as they are called and able.

Motion #3

We strongly encourage that every parish set aside a minimum of .1% of their annual budgets to support layreaders between 2024-2029.

Comments about Motion #3

The purpose of this motion is to strengthen the ministries of layreaders in the diocese.

We recognize that parish budgets are often challenged, but the minimum commitment from each parish is very small: For a parish with an annual budget of $30 000, we are asking that at least $30 be set aside to support layreaders in the parish, for a period of at least five years. For a parish with a $230 000 annual budget, we are asking that at least $230 be set aside to support layreaders in the parish, for a period of at least five years. Of course, parishes may choose to invest beyond the bare minimum.

How parishes can best support their layreaders depends on the local context: It depends on what the layreaders already do, and what training and formation they have already received. Perhaps giving a book would be suitable, or providing funding for a course at Thorneloe or another institution.

Many layreaders have served very faithfully for years, or even decades. Parishes may wish to show some gesture of appreciation and encouragement to their layreaders – a way of saying, “thank you.”

Motion #4

Bearing in mind the “Communion Forest,” we ask that each deanery provide some education about the Christian stewardship of creation; and that each parish undertake at least one initiative, before the next diocesan synod.

Comments about Motion #4

The “Communion Forest” is an initiative which came out of the recent Lambeth Conference. The purpose of Motion #4 is to raise awareness, and a concrete response, to our responsibility as Christians to care for the natural world around us.

There are two steps to this motion: First, each *deanery* is asked to provide some education about care for God’s world, as part of our Christian faith. Second – following this learning process – each *parish* is expected to undertake some initiative, to contribute to the health of our natural environment. The Response Committee observes that there is a great deal of latitude in what parishes might choose to undertake.

The mover added, “We encourage that the wider community, and youth, be informed and encouraged to participate.” That is, we believe that this is one way of demonstrating to people outside the Church how we can live out our faith. For example, we might choose to invite a local journalist to cover the parish project. Youth can also be welcomed to participate.

Peter Armstrong

(on behalf of the Archbishop’s Response Committee)