

BISHOP'S CHARGE

By

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BISHOP OF ALGOMA



**TO THE FORTY-EIGHTH SESSION
OF THE
SYNOD OF THE DIOCESE OF ALGOMA**

Anglican Church of Canada

Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario

May 4, 2017

Bishop's Charge to the 48th Synod of the Diocese of Algoma

May 4th- 6th 2017

God our Father, Lord of all the world, through your Son you have called us into the fellowship of your universal Church;

Hear our prayer for your faithful people that in their vocation and ministry each one may be an instrument of your love.

Give to your servant Anne, our Bishop, the needful gifts of your grace. May she rightly serve you and share the transforming Gospel of Jesus Christ with the people in and around Algoma and beyond.

Equip us, with our new Bishop, to be a church that is joyful in worship, united in witness, and one which serves the world to the glory of your name. This we ask through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Welcome one and all to the 48th Synod of the Diocese of Algoma. 2017 is quite the year with celebrations underway for Canada's 150th birthday, and the commemoration of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. To those for whom this is your first Synod I hope it will be a life giving and uplifting experience and that we will leave on Saturday with fresh energy and a renewed sense of mission for the church.

Perhaps it was an easy decision for you to let your name stand for election as your parish's delegate to Synod. Perhaps it wasn't at all easy, or perhaps you were the only person willing to commit to the responsibilities of a synod delegate. I am grateful that you are here because I believe that God has brought us together for Synod – this group that represents the vastness and the diversity of Algoma at this moment in our history and in the history of the wider Church.

Synod theme

The theme of Synod is words from St. Paul's letter to the Corinthians that we are reminded of every week during the celebration of the Eucharist.

“We, being many, are one body” (1 Cor. 12.12)

As we gather and present ‘ourselves, our souls and our bodies’ (BCP pg. 85) for these days of worship and meeting, of fellowship and prayer, we meet as one body in Christ. Every member plays an important role in the good functioning of that body and your presence here means that the part you will play in Synod is important too. My prayer is that the time we spend together in worship and prayer, in discussion and debate, in listening, learning and sharing ideas, and in the opportunities we have for fellowship and making new friends will draw us closer to one another, and ultimately that we will draw closer to Christ.

Last evening we prayed that the Holy Spirit would sanctify our offering of bread and wine, and we asked that we would be sanctified by the Holy Spirit as well. As a Eucharistic community, the church is the creation of the Holy Spirit. It is not an institution to which the Holy Spirit is later added or which calls upon the Holy Spirit ONLY when we celebrate any of the sacraments. It is the church of Pentecost and is therefore utterly dependent on the Holy Spirit to do its work. May we be open to the leading of the Holy Spirit over these days and in the coming years.

“Put your trust in God and go ahead with the work.” (Ted Scott)

Some of you might feel overwhelmed by the agenda and the work that is before us as a diocese. Take heart! I want to read part of the letter I received from the Primate of Canada, Archbishop Fred Hiltz, shortly after my election.

He writes: *I know how overwhelming the call to be a bishop in the Church of God can be. But I have taken heart in the counsel of Archbishop Howard Clark as he wrote to Ted Scott on the occasion of his election as Bishop of Kootenay in 1971. These were his words:*

“You will find your consecration an unforgettable experience. Any call from God is a frightening and glorious experience and always there is a note of

mystery. We know little about the ways in which prayer works, but we know it works. We know equally little about the economy of grace yet I am sure grace is abounding. Just put your trust in God and go ahead with the work. You will find yourself marvelously and wondrously equipped for your task.” Three things were true for me – feeling overwhelmed, finding the consecration an unforgettable experience, and discovering the economy of grace.

I took those words to heart though.....*Just put your trust in God and go ahead with the work.* As I have begun the work I am grateful for the support and wise counsel of many, including the efficient Synod office staff, the Archdeacons and Bishop’s Council members, the Executive Committee, and so many lay and clergy in the Diocese. I’m also grateful for my friendship with my predecessor, Bishop Stephen, for his leadership of the Diocese over the last eight years, and for the daily love and support I receive from my dear husband Colin.

Having been in parish ministry and part of Bishop’s Council for a number of years I see ‘the work’ that takes place every day in the Diocese of Algoma through the outstanding leadership of clergy and lay. Leading worship, preaching, teaching, pastoral care, administration and property matters too numerous to mention. Over the last two years deanery and diocesan groups and committees like the Thunder Bay’s “Together in Hope” group, the “Strategic Plan Reference Group,” the “Creative Conversations” group in Algoma, and the “Muskoka Ministry Transition Team” have done some very creative and often challenging work in following through with rationalization from the Strategic Plan. I commend them for their courage and faithfulness, and for their commitment to the well-being of the church in looking to the future in a new way.

In addition to these initiatives many congregations have been hard at work preparing to welcome refugee families into their communities, serving meals to the hungry, and finding creative ways to support those in need through clothing closets and food banks. The lonely, the sick, the bereaved and the poor have all been touched by the work of our hands. I recently received a report from the Chair of the Social Justice Committee on how homelessness

and issues around it are being addressed in Algoma and it is impressive. There is enough 'work' to keep us busy 24/7 for years to come, and we know it. As you have gone about this work, I am certain that even though it seemed overwhelming at the start, as you began it you found yourselves equipped to do it and experienced the grace of God in the midst of it.

"It's all God's mission"

But there is something that I have been reminded of in many ways recently, including in the preamble to the Canons which we will examine during this Synod. The 'work' that the Archbishop speaks about is not actually my work, or your work, or even our work. It is *God's work* being done in and through us all, "sealed with the Holy Spirit and marked as Christ's own forever." (BAS pg. 160) In Baptism, God claims us as God's beloved children. In that moment of being sealed in the name of the triune God we are linked with God and with God's family of faith in the Church, the Body of Christ, in the world. We are incorporated into God's mission and God's work as part of that membership.

It's all God's mission.

It's all God's work.

God has been revealing God's mission and desire for the world since the beginning of time. As Christians, we see it most clearly revealed through the life and teaching and mission of God's anointed son Jesus Christ. He came proclaiming that God's kingdom belongs to 'the least of these' who are members of his family. (Matthew 25.40) It's a strange upside down kind of kingdom where the first will be last and the last will be first; where there will be good news for the poor, release for those who are in captivity, sight for those who are blind, and freedom for the oppressed. (Luke 4:18-20) The ideal way to be in this kingdom is to be with one another in God's love.

As we consider the work that is before us in Algoma over the next two years, let's frame it by remembering that we have been invited to participate in God's mission and purpose for the world. What a privilege to have been invited to share in a mission that is so broad and wide and high that it encompasses the whole of the world.

In the opening verses of Paul's letter to the community at Ephesus he prays that, "*with the eyes of your heart enlightened you may know the hope to which he has called you.*" (Ephesians 1.18) If we are only seeing with our eyes or hearing with our ears we are missing a great deal. To see with the eyes of the heart is to imagine the future that God is preparing and that future is always something way, way bigger than we can ever ask or imagine. As Christians we are shaped by more than our own experiences; we are shaped by our hopes, by the future into which we are living, and by the convictions by which we are living now. Hope is best perceived with the eyes of the heart. Hope is best lived within a hopeful community that worships and prays together, that works and eats and laughs and cries together. I see Algoma as a very hopeful community.

The Sacred Bundle

In preparing for Synod I came across the idea of a 'sacred bundle' which the Indigenous people of North America used when they were a nomadic people. ("*Transforming Stewardship*" by C.K. Robertson, Church Publishing, Inc. 2009). They carried a sacred bundle with them as a reminder of who they were. "*Each object in the bundle – seeds, a feather, an ear of corn, carried within itself a story.*" (Transforming Stewardship, pg. 16) When they came together with their elders the bundle would be opened and the members of the group would point to each object in turn and talk about why it was important. By sharing their story through the objects in the bundle the members reminded themselves of who they were - their heritage, their purpose, and their renewed vision for the future. Because they had to travel such long distances there could only be so many items inside the bundle so they had to focus on what was important.

In 1984 the Anglican Communion identified **5 Marks of Mission**, five activities that are characteristic of the Church's mission and work in the world. These were placed in the Anglican Communion's sacred bundle for our journey together. Over the years the Diocese of Algoma has referred to these Marks of Mission for its work, including in the Strategic Plan which drew to a close in 2015. As I have prayed and reflected on them it seems to me that we might combine and reinterpret them in order to give them a new

impetus in a world and diocese that are very different from what they were when the marks of mission were first formulated. We might think of them as seeds for our bundle. My prayers and discussions lead me to suggest that three seeds of Discipleship, Stewardship and Reconciliation encompass everything that the original marks of mission did, but give them fresh impetus and direction.

Before I speak to them let me say that at the end of my charge I would like you, in your table groups, to identify together one more seed that we could add to the sacred bundle so that this Charge and our planning for the next leg of the journey becomes '*mine and thine*'. They will be brought to the Bishop's Charge Response Committee who will discern which of these seeds God is calling us to include in our sacred bundle.

As we consider these seeds and what we will add to our bundle we come in the spirit of listening and receptivity. We want to hear God's voice. We want to know God's mind. We want to discern God's will in all these areas before we act. And so I want to stress the importance of prayer, and of worship, and of our deep connection with God as the source of the life that leads us to grow these seeds.

"Proclaim the good news of the Kingdom of God" and "Teach, Baptize and nurture new believers" (Marks of Mission 1 and 2)

Focus on Discipleship

These are about discipleship and about formation as disciples of Christ. We have a great story to tell about the kingdom of God that is alive and well and in our midst. We are called to grow in our faith, to be transformed in our lives, and then to invite others do the same.

Who we are in Christ is at the heart of who we are as a church. If we are to thrive as a people of God we must take discipleship seriously. When I was in parish ministry new people came to church because they wanted to begin or to re-establish their relationship with Christ. I'm sure this is your experience also. If they don't find Christ there, or if there is a sense that our relationship with Christ doesn't really matter or isn't emphasized, people won't stay.

Outreach, and fellowship and property are all important, but only as a response to an encounter with the living Christ.

Bishop Roger White, author of the book, *New Millenium, New Church* in describing the decline in membership in the Episcopal (Anglican) Church says that “*We have seen a propensity in our church for it to be very easy to join, easy to be baptized, easy to be confirmed, and then very easy to slide out unnoticed. We have become a church of ‘easy in and easy out’, with not much expected and not much given. We have become a church of ‘thin commitment’ having a substantial contingency of nominal members and a large and uncommitted fringe.*” (Shaping our Future: Challenges for the Church in the Twenty First Century, pg. 54)

Now I am not suggesting that we suddenly set stringent rules of membership that will probably have the effect of chasing people away, but what I am suggesting is that together, as a diocese, and in our parishes and congregations, we explore how better to be the church of our motto. Let us find new ways of setting our hearts and the hearts of our people on fire for the love of Christ. May this love be visible in and through us so that this love spills over into every aspect of our lives together as a faith community, but also in our homes and the communities in which we live. Discipleship is about the whole of our lives – in the words of priest and poet George Herbert, “Seven whole days not one in seven I will praise thee.”

A look at the Congregational Development Officer’s Report in your Synod handbook describes the variety of discipleship initiatives that have been undertaken in the last few years across Algoma. These include, “Becoming The Story We Tell” and the “Lift Up Your Hearts” initiative. Many congregations used the resources provided and others have been using resources like Alpha, Youth Emmaus, Godly Play, or their own studies. Whacky Wednesday, Wild Fridays and Messy Church, as a way of introducing the unchurched to faith, has taken off in some parts of the Diocese. The Cursillo movement continues to be active in parts of the Diocese.

Formation in our church has often been focused on preparation for the sacraments, such as baptism, confirmation, holy communion, or marriage.

However, we know that it needs to extend beyond those particular moments and be ongoing for all ages and stages in life. We've learned that in Algoma 'one size doesn't fit all'. How can we offer a fine baptismal or confirmation preparation program when there haven't been any baptisms or confirmations for a year or more? How can we have a bible study when there is no one who feels equipped to teach it, or when most members are away for the winter? Even though one size doesn't fit all, I do think we need to wrestle with what will then work in our unique context rather than simply opting out of doing things that might be hard or demanding.

There are things that we can do to nurture our faith, grow it, and share it with others. "Follow me." Jesus said to his disciples and they got up and followed him. They were with him day in and day out and as they listened and observed they came to know and understand his mission and purpose. We don't have Jesus in the same way that the earliest disciples did, but we do have the Scriptures. Every confirmation candidate in Algoma receives a beautiful leather bookmark from the Bishop as a gift. The words that are inscribed on it is, "Hear, read, mark, learn and inwardly digest" from the BCP Collect for the 2nd Sunday in Advent and a reference to the Holy Scriptures. In the coming years I would like to see us engaging more deeply and more widely with them, and here's a suggestion for how we can do it that would work for our diverse diocese.

I was recently made aware of a resource from the Anglican Communion called "Deeper Engagement". It's a tool box of resources from the 'Bible in the Life of the Church' whose aim it is to develop a "wider and fuller biblical literacy" (Archbishop Rowan Williams) in the Anglican Communion. To be a biblical Church is *'surely to be a community that lives out this great story day by day and commends it to people as the most comprehensive truth possible about the nature of God and God's world.'* (Deeper Engagement)

Opening this resource is to find a toolbox filled with any number of ways to engage the Bible – from Lectio Divina and Gospel Based Discipleship to engaging with the Bible through drama and image, videos and articles. It's a resource that can be used for a wide range of audiences. It can be used in small groups and for whole congregations, where literacy is weak, or knowledge of the Bible is poor. It can be used for those being trained for

authorized ministries in the Church, those new to exploring the Bible, those interested in going deeper in their engagement with the Bible, those who want to find a different approach to Bible Study, and those who want to know how other Anglicans understand and use the Bible. It all comes in a minute flash drive and I commend it to your use. I have one copy of it available for each deanery. The present Archbishop of Canterbury says that ‘this project is utterly foundational for our life together.’

Stewardship as part of Discipleship

In his Charge to Synod in May 2015, Bishop Stephen focused on the theme of gratitude. He remarked on how much there is to be thankful for in our lives both individually and as a community of faith. With this in mind, he invited us to embark on a season of gratitude across the diocese in a more deliberate way. A five week program called "Lift Up Your Hearts" began in September of that year and continued until Thanksgiving Sunday. It included Bible studies, litanies for worship, a sermon series, a book study, and an every member visitation. It was not to be a stewardship campaign or a financial ask but simply that we would celebrate God's goodness to us together. Many of you embraced that time and found it to be a rich and full time.

"All good gifts around us are sent from heaven above, so thank the Lord, O thank the Lord for all His love," Our response to these good gifts is one of gratitude. And surely also responsibility and accountability and transformed lives?

The early Christian community described by Luke in Acts showed a radical transformation in their shared life as they viewed the gifts given to them as things to be shared for the good of all, rather than to be stored up and hoarded.

I commend the book, "Transforming Stewardship" by C.K. Robertson to you for use in your congregations. In it you will find reference to Biblical characters like Barnabas who have a lot to teach us about a holistic approach to stewardship. God is concerned with all that we are and all that we have, and not just a percentage of our paycheck.

Since then I have been thinking a great deal about what it means to be a good steward of all these good gifts.

The word 'steward' is linked to the idea of a household. Luke, and the Epistle writers coined the word 'oikonomos' as someone who was the manager of household affairs. Those of us who have ever had responsibility for a household know that there is more than just one aspect to running a home such as taking care of finances or the building. A steward is someone who has oversight over family members including elders and underage children.

There is something relational about the steward's role and this is the kind of stewardship I would like us to think about in Algoma. Stewardship that is as much concerned with our relationships with one another, and with creation, as it is about our possessions, time and treasure.

Stewardship is something that the Strategic Plan Reference Group named as one of its priorities for its work last year, and it's why we have invited Dean Andrew Asbil to be the keynote speaker at this Synod. I had the pleasure of meeting Dean Asbil at a National Church gathering on Stewardship "INSPIRE! INVITE! THANK!" that took place in Toronto last fall. His presentation on giving was superb, with much of what he had to say resonating with me personally, and also as the incumbent of a parish. He spoke about the necessity in talking about giving in a way that is invitational and not offensive and in a way that encouraged generosity. "Our offering and the way we give of ourselves and become cheerful givers changes us", Dean Asbil said, "but it also changes the people around us who are noticing."

For the next two and a half days Dean Asbil will be our tour guide and help us to gain a deeper understanding of stewardship and to develop a theology of stewardship that is sound and strong; holistic and realistic, and to help us to prayerfully discern the direction for this aspect of our lives together. Welcome to Algoma, Dean Asbil.

“To transform unjust structures, challenging violence of every kind, and pursuing peace and reconciliation.” (Marks of Mission 4)

Let’s consider reconciling relationships as part of discipleship.

Another aspect of Bishop Stephen’s Charge in 2015 had to do with the work of healing and reconciliation and transforming relationships, particularly with our Indigenous members. Several important initiatives came out of this including a closer working relationship with Bishop Lydia in the Thunder Bay -North Shore Deanery, allotting our Anglican Council of Indigenous Peoples a vote on the Executive Committee, and participating in the Primate’s 22 Days initiative in ringing the church bells for missing and murdered aboriginal women. In addition to this the deanery of Sudbury/Manitoulin have been engaged in some intentional relationship building, and in finding opportunities to share, join, and be with their Indigenous neighbours.

At my consecration I was given a beautiful pair of moccasins by the Métis Nation of Ontario and which I am wearing in services across Algoma.

As I ‘rock the mocs’ they remind me of my motto for 2017 –

*“How beautiful upon the mountains
are the feet of the messenger who announces peace,
who brings good news,
who announces salvation,
who says to Zion, ‘Your God reigns’.” (Isaiah 52.7)*

Won’t you join me in being a people who are bearers of the good news of Jesus Christ to all?

Members of the diocese are now trained to facilitate the KAIROS Blanket Exercise which I would like to see taking place in every deanery over the next two years.

Algoma has received a \$78,000 refund from the federal government on the money that we contributed towards the national Residential Schools Settlement Agreement. We received this refund because what we contributed exceeded what was required of us under this Agreement. It will

be up to the Executive Committee to determine how we should best use this money, but we will do it with input from all of our Diocese.

We will continue to foster our friendship with Bishop Mwita Akiri and the Diocese of Tarime as well as the very important relationships that are being built across Algoma between Anglicans and the Ecumenical community.

A big part of ecumenical work over the last year or so has been the tremendous work that is being done to bring refugee families from war torn countries to your community. The response across Algoma has been terrific, often in conjunction with the ecumenical community. I know that in many instances the process itself has not been an easy one and that many of you have delays in the arrival of your family. The marks of mission call us to “transform unjust structures challenging violence of every kind.”

Reconciliation calls for us to do and to be different and to right the wrongs of the world.

Reconciling relationships within the Diocese is as important as without. During this Synod we will be spending time in table groups in the Christian practice of discernment. With the help and guidance of facilitators this will give us the opportunity to work together to engage with difficult questions in a healthy and positive way.

It is no secret that there are a number of difficult and potentially divisive issues facing the church nationally and locally, including the proposed changes to the marriage canon in the Anglican Church of Canada. This matter will come before General Synod in 2019 for its second reading.

Following General Synod in 2016, the Primate of Canada, Archbishop Fred Hiltz, referred the matter of the proposed changes back to the diocese and parishes for discussion and input. In consultation with members on all sides of the issue we will be developing a process to enable our congregations to engage in discussions and conversations around this matter in a way that allows for input in a non-threatening way.

I am conscious that there are very strong feelings and opinions around the issue of same sex marriage. These convictions are held by members who are deeply committed Christians and have reached them as a result of prayer,

learning and study. But I am also aware that there is a large group of members across Algoma who are somewhere in the middle - who as yet are undecided about where they are on this matter, and are in a period of discernment. There are also young people in the diocese who are observing us as leaders as we engage with one another in these difficult conversations.

In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul asks the Church this question, “Has Christ been divided?” (1. Cor. 12) No, of course not. Therefore we need to spend time, together, in all our diversity and pray and discern what God might be saying to us as a diocese. What comes to mind is the motif of the Body of Christ in Ephesians 4. Paul ‘begs’ the members to lead a life “worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” This will be the goal for this time of discernment in this Synod and in the coming years as we engage in difficult conversations remembering that what unites us is our commitment to God and to God’s mission.

“Living reconciliation does not mean putting aside our beliefs. It means something far more threatening; it means recognizing that the person you believe to be completely wrong on some issue of significance is on a journey with Christ and with you.”

(Living Reconciliation, pg. 44)

In my own reading on reconciliation and healing, I found the book, “Living Reconciliation” by Phil Groves and Angharad Parry Jones (Forward Movement, 2014) to be most helpful. It was inspired by the Indaba process of deep listening and seeking common ground around the Anglican Communion. Although global issues were a part of the Indaba conversations the authors recognize that “*living reconciliation begins with each one of us in our local contexts.*” It is something that is entrusted to each of us and that is lived out daily in our relationships with one another in our homes, faith communities, places of work, and in recreation.

We celebrate this in the Eucharist which is the story of Christ’s reconciling love for the world remembered in words and experienced in bread and wine. Worship ends with us being sent out into the world to live that peace and be

a reconciling community. The journey of reconciliation begins from where we are, not from where we think we ought to be. It is a journey that is marked not by its destination but by the landmarks encountered and relationships formed along the way. Companions on our journey of reconciliation are our own stories and the scriptures (deeper engagement with the Bible).

Concluding remarks

In choosing vestments for my consecration I chose a mitre and chasuble with the San Damiano Crucifix on it. This crucifix was the one that St. Francis prayed before when he received his call from God and is considered to be an icon which is like a window that points beyond itself to something else. The strangeness of an icon lies in the fact that it is not simply a representation of the scene, but an attempt to portray the scene in such a way that the human event shown is soaked with the divine life. In doing so it reminds us that all life is permeated divine life and that all our Christian life then must be open to and reflect the indwelling divine life. May this be true of our mission and ministry in the Diocese of Algoma.

Thank you for what each one of you brings to the life and mission of the church.

I close with the prayer of St. Francis before the San Damiano Crucifix:

**Most high, glorious God,
Cast your light into the darkness of my heart.
Give me, Lord, right faith, firm hope, perfect charity and profound
humility,
With wisdom and perception, so that I may carry out what is truly your
holy will.**

Amen.

Faithfully submitted,

The Rt. Rev. Anne Germond
Bishop of Algoma
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