



BISHOP OF THE ANGLICAN DIOCESE OF OTTAWA

THE BISHOP'S CHARGE TO SYNOD – 2021

God, we thank you for the glorious company of the apostles, and especially on this day for Simon and Jude. As they were faithful and zealous in their mission, so may we with ardent devotion make known the love and mercy of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Collect of the Day

When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father, he will testify on my behalf. You also are to testify because you have been with me from the beginning. John 15.17-27

1 The reading from the Gospel of John for this feast of Saint Simon and Saint Jude is part of a passage we often hear on the day of Pentecost. In the passage as a whole, Jesus is saying farewell to his disciples. Soon he will be taken from them, and he is assuring them they will not be alone. Not only will they have each other, God will be with them in the person of the Holy Spirit. Jesus is preparing them to be the church in the world that will not readily receive them—and may even be hostile to them.

Jesus is saying he will soon become part of the disciples' past, but the Holy Spirit will be in their future. He is telling Simon and Jude, along with the other disciples who had journeyed with him, that the Holy Spirit will be a replacement for his presence among them as they face the years ahead. Jesus promises to send the Spirit of Truth from God the Father, to accompany his followers as their teacher, comforter, counselor, and guide throughout time.

For Simon and Jude and the other early Christians, the day of Pentecost—when Jesus sent the gift of the Holy Spirit—marked the moment between looking back at their personal memories of Jesus and looking ahead to a future where they must rely on one another and seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit among them.

We, too, are in a moment where the past we have known is giving way to a future we must give shape to. And we, too, must trust that God the Holy Spirit is already in our future; we must be confident and faithful as we move forward—knowing there will be joy and challenge in our work together.

Our confidence will come from recognizing that God the Holy Spirit is with us and with the world around us. Our task is not to bring the Holy Spirit to the world, but to affirm and celebrate God's presence in every place, in every person, in every creature—in all that is, seen and unseen.

Our faithfulness will come from relying on one another and trusting in the guidance of the Holy Spirit, who will speak to us in our councils, vestries, committees, and synods. Our task is to break free from structures which hold us to a time that has passed, and to be visionary and courageous as we face the future.

2 The Holy Spirit has spoken to us during the coronavirus pandemic, causing us to see how rates of infection, mortality, and vaccination are affected by grossly uneven distributions of wealth and power, locally and globally; and how generosity, justice, and compassion can bring relief, equity, and healing. I pray the Holy Spirit will continue to guide us more deeply into the experience of those of us who constantly live with deprivation and restrictions—and through our parish ministries and community ministries to find new ways to accompany and assist all our siblings who live precariously.

The Holy Spirit also made us see the need to be cohesive, creative, and profoundly faithful as a diocesan church. Since everything changed over a year and a half ago, we have steadfastly stayed connected, offering pastoral care, fellowship, and worship in new and creative ways in our parish ministries—and rapidly pivoting, adjusting, and in some cases expanding community ministries to meet the needs of those we are called to accompany and serve.

Our parishes have lived in the red, amber, and yellow stages of our pandemic plan, listening carefully to advice, and moving with extreme concern for everyone's safety. Our community ministries have seen a greater intensification of need, and our staff in those ministries have been fully engaged as demands have shifted.

We have felt how resilient and determined we can be when it comes to sharing the expansive love of Christ. That strength, resilience and determination will see us through this public health crisis and will serve us well in the months and years ahead.

We have also felt the weight of it all, especially our clergy, lay leaders, and community ministry staff. The pandemic has been unrelenting, and has caused real stress and fatigue. Please continue to take care of yourselves and one another, keeping things as simple as possible and setting a sustainable pace. It is okay not to do things. It is okay if numbers are down. It is okay if you need to take a break or get some help. Do what makes the most sense in your particular ministry context. Be sure to know when you are off duty, and fill those times with things that restore your body and mind. Stay healthy so you can serve others: self-care is not selfish.

I am profoundly grateful to all our clergy, lay leaders, and staff in our parish and community ministries, and to our senior staff for being responsive, careful, and undaunted as we have implemented and often revised our pandemic plan. I am deeply thankful for all the people of our diocese, who have, with much good will, supported the restrictions and changes which had to be imposed. The end is in sight, we will get through this together, and we will deal with whatever life is like when the pandemic is over. All shall be well.

3 In last year's charge to Synod, I lifted up our four strategic priorities, and promised to focus us on fully addressing them in a timely and disciplined manner.

With respect to our top priority of communications, the Episcopal Communications Panel has prepared a comprehensive strategic plan, and is working closely with our Director of Communications and Stewardship and her staff to implement it. Significantly, the panel advised retaining a professional agency to work with us to rebrand our diocese—and during this meeting of Synod our new brand will be launched.

A brand conveys who we understand ourselves to be and how we want others to see us. Our new brand will communicate the character of our diocesan church as vibrant, innovative, open, compassionate, and faithful. Our visual logo will communicate how we are a people of the resurrection, a people of Easter faith, who radiate and receive the vibrant diversity of creation—a people who trust the Holy Spirit is with and around us. Our new brand will both celebrate us and challenge us as we serve in the world God loves.

4 Our second strategic priority concerns the shape of parish ministry and our buildings. We owe a huge thanks to the Shape of Parish Ministry Consultation (SPMC) Team, who has spent many hours engaged in Stage I conversations with every congregation in our diocese, helping us to answer important questions and assemble solid profiles for every parish.

This has been undertaken with great skill and care, and our parish leaders have made every effort to participate in this urgent work. The SPMC tasks between now and Synod 2022 are critically important and participation in them is mandatory for parish clergy and lay leaders. Stage II of the consultation will move us from description to analysis, as we together review all parish profiles and consider what we are seeing—and what the Holy Spirit is calling us to see. Stage III of the consultation will move us from analysis toward making concrete proposals—leading to consensus decision-making at our next Synod.

This work is focused on the shape of parish ministry: where we are called to have buildings and how we deliver ministry to everyone across our diocese. Our beautiful Anglican tradition of worship using authorized forms of prayer will continue to be a constant for us—as it has been for centuries. The principles of common prayer distinguish us and are integral to our identity—providing comforting familiarity to us from Sunday to Sunday while allowing our liturgies to develop in ways that are firmly anchored.

Undergirded by common prayer, let us, as bishop, clergy, and people, courageously address the urgent questions facing us, and let us creatively use our collective resources to give new shape to our parish ministries so they can thrive. I am energized and motivated to fearlessly take on the task which has fallen to our generation. Let us be vibrant, innovative, open, compassionate, and faithful. Let us rely on one another and the Holy Spirit as we all participate in the collective reshaping of our parish ministries.

5 Our third and fourth strategic priorities are engagement with the world and lifelong learning. As promised last year, I asked Diocesan Council to instruct our Governance Committee to undertake a governance review, with particular emphasis on those parts of our committee structure not adequately suited to supporting and achieving these two priorities. That review is underway, and, among other things, will see us being more intentional in building partnerships with other groups who seek engagement with the world in proactive, Christ-like ways. The review will also develop our capacity to educate ourselves and be better equipped to serve as a minority in a diverse and plural world.

In 2023, I expect us to have largely implemented our strategic communications plan and be well into implementing changes related to the shape of our parish ministry. As these two top priorities become an integral part of how we operate, we will want to refresh or define a new set of strategic

priorities, to be sure we are consciously seeking and attending to the voice of the Holy Spirit among us.

6 In 2020 the murder of George Floyd catapulted the issue of racism into the minds of all people of conscience. In the summer of this year, the voices of Indigenous Children who perished in Residential Schools cried out to everyone in our country. We, who would follow Jesus, must not simply think or hear about racism: we are called to act against racism and to construct just and equitable relationships with one another.

Project Anti-Racism is a mandatory awareness and capacity-building program for all clergy in our parish ministries, all managers in our community ministries, and our senior staff. Once our key leaders have completed Project Anti-Racism training early next year, they will be charged with bringing what they have learned to every ministry context.

The education committee proposed in the governance review will seek out or develop resources to enable all of us to be equipped to address the insidious and dehumanizing effects of racism. In the meantime, we must continue to make space to hear Indigenous, Black, Asian, and other racialized peoples speak of how racism cuts into self-esteem, safety, and opportunity. Our commitment to reconciliation depends upon it.

Diversity, equity, inclusion, and reconciliation reflect our belief in the communion of all that is, seen and unseen. In our baptismal covenant we vow to seek and serve Christ in all persons, to strive for justice and peace among all people, and to respect the dignity of every human being. Our belief is clearly intended to be accompanied by meaningful action. Our credibility in the world depends upon it.

7 During this Synod there will be a presentation on how we will mark the 125th anniversary of the founding of our diocese, noting in particular our renewed commitment to affordable housing.

As we look forward from this anniversary year, I pray we will fully embrace what it means to be a diocesan church and see ourselves as collectively strong, resilient, and resource-filled. I believe our future depends on doing so.

Our diocese, not the diocese. We, not they. Every parish is ours. Every community ministry is ours. We are in communion with one another, deeply and inextricably. And it all belongs to God in Christ Jesus.

Like Saint Simon and Saint Jude, we belong to a generation who must look ahead to the future in a new way. We live in a time where the past we have known is giving way to a future we must give shape to. And we, too, must trust that God the Holy Spirit is already in our future, and be confident and faithful as we move forward.

*The Right Reverend Shane A. D. Parker
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