

You are the Body of Christ

The Anglican Church in Newfoundland and Labrador: The State of the Union

**A Talk Given by the Rt. Rev. Dr. Geoff Peddle at the Diocesan Synod of the
Diocese of Eastern Newfoundland and Labrador, May 24, 2014**

The State of our Union today

I have called my talk this morning a “State of the Union Address,” borrowing from the term used for the annual report of the President of the United States to a joint session of Congress in which the President discusses the condition of the nation and also outlines national priorities. And that is precisely what I intend to do this morning with reference to the Diocese of Eastern Newfoundland and Labrador. Our theme for Synod this year is “*You are the Body of Christ*” and it is appropriate that we reflect deeply upon our membership in his Body. As Christians we ponder not so much the state of our union but the state of our health as members of Christ’s Body.

How did we get here?

There is no question that our Church has declined in recent years in terms of its membership, ministry, and larger role in society. We have all seen that. But how did we get here? We find ourselves today in North America and Western Europe at a rather advanced stage of a process that began several hundred years ago ...

The philosopher Charles Taylor frames it this way: How did we get from a state where everyone believed in a world of the supernatural – God and gods - to a state where many no longer believe at all? As he states it, it was all but impossible *not* to believe in God one time and to belong to a faith community, and now for many, it is all but impossible *to* believe and belong. What has happened?

The first inkling of change came late in the Middle Ages, following a period of remarkable stability for the Christian Church in the West as it grew and gained power and influence. But it was a power and influence based upon the revelations of Holy Scripture and the teachings of a long line of theologians like Augustine, Anselm and Aquinas. Then the Enlightenment came and suddenly a new source of knowledge emerged, one based not upon revelation or the teachings of the past, but upon direct observation of our world and universe. The Scientific Method had arrived and the power of observation began to replace the authority of revelation and tradition.

The Enlightenment arose out of the “Age of Reason” and brought about an intense (and ongoing) debate over the relationship between religion and rationalism in which many long-held beliefs were subjected to the light of scientific inquiry. New methodologies based upon observation brought about a fresh understanding of the natural world that in the end served to weaken the authority of both church and scripture as sources of human knowledge. As reason and logic began to define intellectual life, truths based upon revelation and tradition that had served as the social bedrock for centuries were discarded. People discovered a new relationship with their

world in the light of science that led them to question both their relationship with their God and with their worldly masters who often appealed to some form of “divine right” in the governance of their subjects. Theology was increasingly replaced by a humanism that did not necessarily see any divine purpose in the world but asserted that humans themselves should be the measure of all things.

The Catholic Church, which was *the* Church in Western Europe, was not altogether happy about this new path to knowledge. Remember Galileo? Using the power of observation he stated that the sun and planets did not orbit the earth but that the earth, along with the other planets, orbited the sun. The Church said this was contrary to scripture and had him sentenced to house arrest, although, four hundred years later admitted that it had been wrong. But the Church could not win this battle. Scientific observation was beginning to replace biblical revelation as the source of authority for many. And the power of science was borne out as a long line of researchers and thinkers and inventors gave the world the fruits of science like harnessing the power of steam and massive improvements in health care. By the time of the Industrial Revolution human abilities were successfully explaining more things in the natural world than the Bible.

And the Catholic Church faced other challenges that diminished its power. Beginning in the 16th Century the Church found itself split in Europe as the Protestant Reformation took hold, largely over the issue of scriptural authority. Then came the French Revolution in the 1770's and a wholesale assault upon the Catholic Church in France. Secularism became the cry of freedom as the power of the Church was diminished and the republic was declared: ***Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité*** "Freedom, Equality, Brotherhood". The State was now replacing the Church as the source of all moral and temporal authority and people no longer had to look to the Church for protection. And for many, human freedom and flourishing was associated not with the Church any longer but with the state and democratic freedoms. This was also the time when people began to leave their familiar villages and patterns of life and head to the cities in search of work. A cash-based society emerged. Links with the traditional way of life from the past began to disappear. A succession of thinkers and writers followed who questioned religious authority and challenged the power of the Church and Holy Scripture:

- Charles Darwin suggested that we were the result of evolution like every other mammal, and not creation.
- Friedrich Nietzsche declared that God was dead.
- Karl Marx called religion the “opium of the people”.
- Sigmund Freud wrote *The Future of an Illusion* to tell us where he thought religion was going.
- And so it continued until today when writers like Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens repeatedly publish best-selling books attacking religion with titles like *The God Delusion*, and *God is not Great - How Religion Poisons Everything*.

My list could go on and on. But hopefully my point has been made. By the 20th Century it had become possible to dismiss the teachings of the Church and all religious authority in favor of humanist and materialist philosophy. This is the background against which all religious practice happens for us today and the vast majority of us accepts it without question. The message has been received and internalized that it is okay not to

believe in God, or to create your own religion, but it is your choice. The authority of religious institutions has been diminished. And even though we could not see it coming at the beginning of the 20th Century, religion has now been pushed out of the public sphere altogether in many places and has become a private and optional practice.

This is what we now call the process of secularization. It is a way of describing the loss of religious life and practice in society and the decline in religious affiliation and attendance in Europe and North America. It is now well underway in our province. At risk of oversimplifying a complex theory, Secularization Theory is the belief that as societies become more advanced in areas like politics, technology, medicine and education the role of religion and religious beliefs will diminish in a more or less linear fashion until eventually religious faith will all but disappear, replaced by systems structured purely on rationalism and humanism. I will provide examples of the decline of religious affiliation and participation:

- The proposed Quebec Charter of Values by the *Partie Quebecois* before their recent electoral defeat was consistent with this thinking and would have effectively banned all public displays of religion. Think about that: in just fifty short years, religion in Quebec has gone from the very core of Quebec Francophone identity to something the Francophone government of the day wanted to suppress totally.
- Even the former Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams has now declared that “Britain is a post-Christian country” where the cultural memory of the faith remains strong but the daily practice has evaporated.

From the Interview with Archbishop Rowan Williams, *The Telegraph*, May 4, 2014:

“If I say that this is a post-Christian nation, that doesn’t mean necessarily non-Christian. It means the cultural memory is still quite strongly Christian. And in some ways, the cultural presence is still quite strongly Christian. But it is post-Christian in the sense that habitual practice for most of the population is not taken for granted ... A Christian nation can sound like a nation of committed believers, and we are not that. Equally, we are not a nation of dedicated secularists. I think we’re a lot less secular than the most optimistic members of the British Humanist Association would think.”

So are we a Christian nation or not? Yes or no?

“A Christian country as a nation of believers? No. A Christian country in the sense of still being very much saturated by this vision of the world and shaped by it? Yes.”

Will we lose our faith altogether in time?

“Given that we have a younger generation now who know less about this legacy than people under 45, there may be a further shrinkage of awareness and commitment.”

Beyond that, he is hopeful.

“The other side is that people then rediscover Christianity with a certain freshness, because it’s not ‘the boring old stuff that we learnt at school and have come to despise’. I see signs of that, talking to youngsters here at Magdalene and in school visits. There is a curiosity about Christianity.” He remembers the delight of primary-school pupils when he told them the story of the Prodigal Son, which they had never heard. “There is a real possibility of people engaging freshly and hearing things as if for the first time.”

- In 2013, the Canadian Bible Forum engaged the market research company, Angus Reid Strategies, to undertake the Canadian Bible Engagement Study. More than 4,500 people across Canada were interviewed for the study, which revealed that most Canadian Christians do not read their Bible at home anymore. Since 1996, weekly Bible reading by Christians has declined by half and only 14% read the Bible at least once per month.

- In Newfoundland and Labrador, within our lifetimes, we have seen our school system transferred to state control, along with our hospitals. Crosses have been removed from public buildings. Fully 40% of patients in our hospitals identifying themselves as Anglican ask that Anglican Chaplains *not* visit them these days. Translation: before we used to visit everyone who identified as Anglican; today our chaplains only visit 60%.

- Clergy tell me today that they regularly encounter children coming for Confirmation who do not know the Lord's Prayer and who do not say a prayer with a parent at night when going to bed.

It has been a “paradigm shift” for us with enormous social changes in matters like education, health care, career demands, delayed marriage and children. And the growth of technology actually leaves us with less, not more, free time. Our values and expectations have also changed markedly. People understand community differently today and will not automatically belong to social clubs and organizations. Institutional loyalty is a thing of the past. Denominational loyalty is a thing of the past.

Is it any wonder that churches find this changing landscape confusing and difficult to read? It reminds me of Charles Dickens' story, *A Tale of Two Cities*, about England at the time of the Industrial Revolution and France during a different revolution around 1775:

“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way...” (Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities*, 1859)

An Uneasy Divide

So we find ourselves today at a place where religion and religious belief is under suspicion and attack in the public sphere. While religion continues to exert influence privately in most of our lives, faith communities can no longer count on a natural and familiar relationship with their own members, let alone with the world surrounding them. In Newfoundland and Labrador, churches continue to be places of shelter and meaning during major life transitions (Baptisms, Confirmations, Weddings, Funerals) but for a growing number of our people that relationship is not ongoing and regular in between those moments. And for a small but growing number of our people there is no longer any point of contact with a faith community. The place of clergy and religious leaders has moved from the very centre of social life here in Newfoundland and Labrador to a place that is at the margins of social life if at all. The result for many churches and leaders, both lay and ordained, has been a role-confusion that ranges from nostalgia for the past at its mildest to outright cynicism and despair at its harshest.

Charles Taylor calls it the *Malaise of Modernity*: the end of all stories. We are now in a place where we no longer defer to tradition or custom but make it up as we go. There is no one master narrative for us anymore like the one the Church taught, but many stories that we create ourselves. Miroslav Volf has described it as a culture stripped of grace, an impersonal world of big government and big business where all that governed us in the past is no longer.

But there is a problem; because, as important as the advances have been in scientific progress and health care and democratic freedoms, the modern-day state falls short when it comes to offering meaning to life. That continues to be a religious quest for most people. You see, governments and social welfare agencies and employers can provide many of the basic needs of people today but after those essentials like food and clothing and shelter and health care are met, there remain those other needs of meaning and purpose and community that are far more intimate than any larger organization with an eye on the bottom line can ever hope to meet. There continues to be a human need for answers beyond what materialism can offer. Despite our advances in recent years, most of us still believe that Newfoundland and Labrador cannot be built on economic know-how alone.

And the difference between the religious point of view and the secular point of view could not be starker:

Many today will say that we are alone in an uncaring universe ... but scripture tells us that God so loved the world that he gave his only Son so that whosoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

Some will say that you are only of value as long as you are useful ... but Jesus says that not even a sparrow falls that God doesn't see ... and you are more precious than a sparrow.

The atheist may say life is hard and then you die ... but Jesus says, "Come unto me all ye who labour and I will give you rest for you souls, for my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

Biology suggests that your life is simply the result of cosmic chance followed by evolution ... but scripture says that you have been created in the image of God.

The sceptic says the poor have already received their reward ... but Jesus says the Kingdom of heaven will be theirs.

The powerful of this world are proud to say it is survival of the fittest out there ... but Jesus tells us that it is the meek who will inherit the earth.

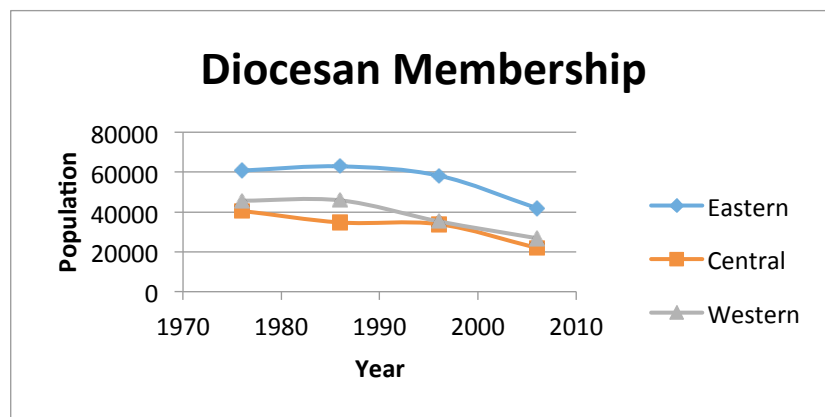
The secular view of life and the religious view of life are *not* the same. In fact the religious view is often the very opposite of the secular view. They are vastly different worldviews and we need to understand that. The Universe is either a cosmic accident with life an accidental outcome or we are created by God. What our Church proclaims and what our society proclaims are not the same thing.

Which brings me, finally, to Newfoundland and Labrador. And more specifically, the Anglican Church in Newfoundland and Labrador.

The State of our Union: How the Anglican Church in Newfoundland and Labrador Defies Modernity

Notions of secularization may be applied to the Anglican Church in Newfoundland and Labrador but only in a limited sense. If we hold to the classic theory of secularization that as a society advances industrially and educationally there should be a dropping off of religious belief and practice then it is possible for us to see that this has not exactly happened in this province. We see a population that has certainly changed in recent years and a church that has also changed, but in neither case has the adjustment meant the wholesale decline of religious belief and practice.

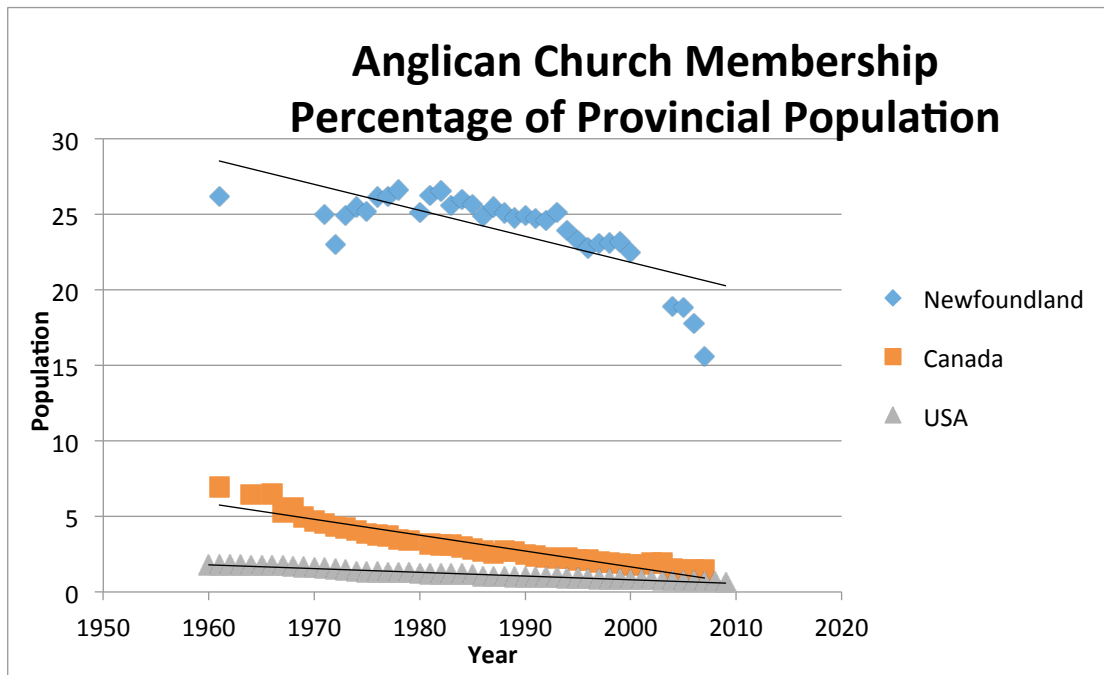
The following graphs are borrowed from my past and ongoing research into the church here and will serve to illustrate what I am talking about. An analysis of key markers of church participation and affiliation for the Anglican Church in Newfoundland and Labrador (rates of Membership, Baptisms, Confirmations, Marriages, and Funerals) reveals some rather consistent patterns among all three dioceses since 1976. I will begin with membership. **(For those who don't want to wade through the data in the next sections please skip to page 17 for my conclusion: The Anglican Church will endure but what kind of Church will it be?)**



Although membership calculations can be the most complicated aspect of church analysis with much room for subjectivity in deciding who is in and who is out, all three dioceses comprising the Anglican Church in Newfoundland and Labrador have engaged in efforts to get a better picture of who belongs and all figures used in this analysis come directly from the dioceses themselves. The Dioceses of Central and Western Newfoundland and Labrador faced unprecedented social upheaval and population loss in the 1990s in the wake of the Groundfish Moratorium when the overall provincial population declined by 13% leading to expected membership decline for the dioceses. The most recent available figures for all three dioceses together were for 2007 and showed decline from 1976 when the dioceses were first set up.

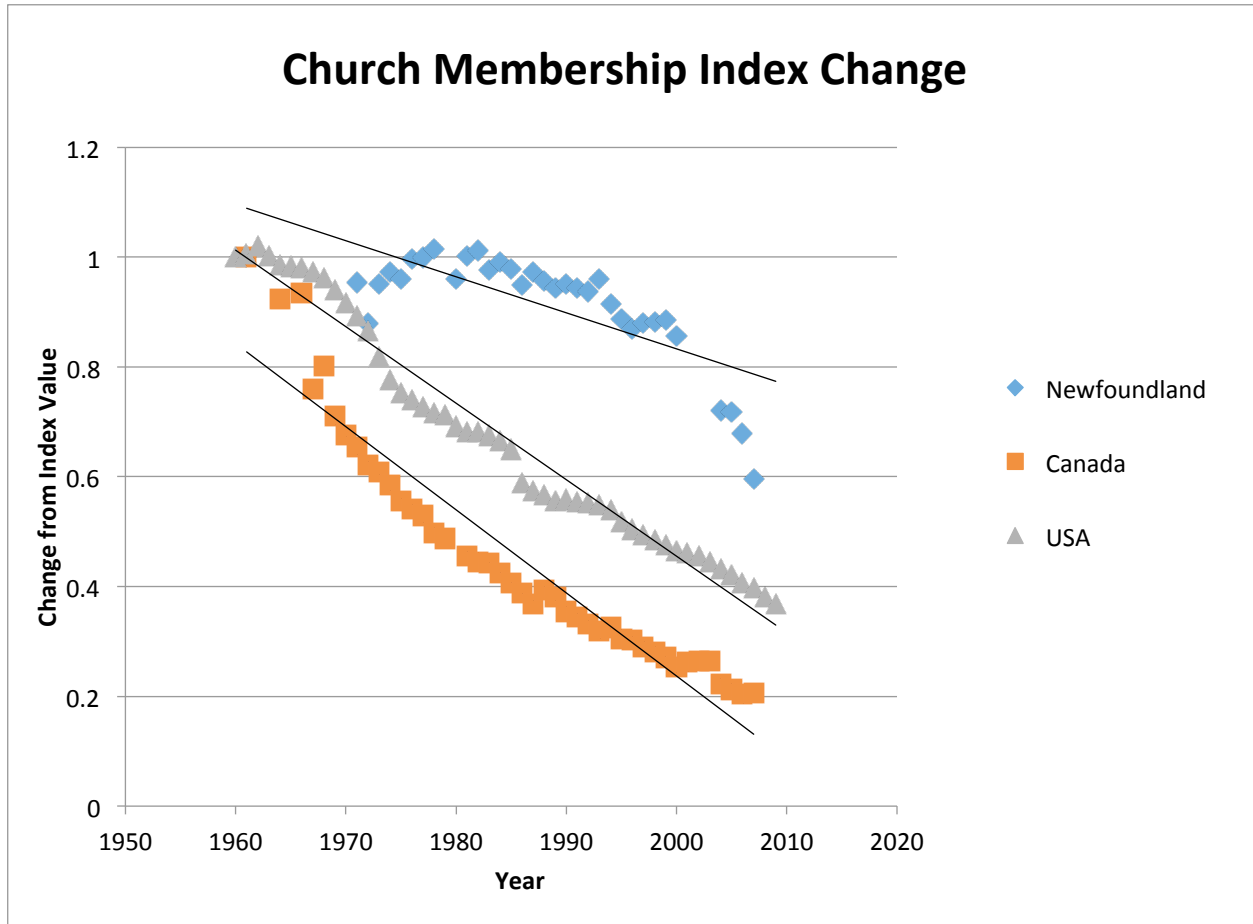
Selected Diocesan Membership (1976-2007)		
	<u>1976</u>	<u>2007</u>
EN&L	60,868	38,884
Central	40,637	21,432
Western	45,562	18,701

However, membership decline in the Diocese of Eastern Newfoundland and Labrador is a very different matter because this diocese, distinct from the others, saw minimal population loss within its boundaries during the 1990s and even experienced a slight increase with more than 50% of the Newfoundland and Labrador population residing on the Avalon Peninsula by 2007. But not only did the diocese lose over a third of its members by 2007, it did so during a time when the population on the Avalon Peninsula remained stable with many Newfoundland and Labrador Anglicans moving to the region from other parts of the province. While baptisms, confirmations, weddings and funerals did not show appreciable decline as a percent of overall population, the Diocese of Eastern Newfoundland and Labrador failed to attract new members and up to 2008 was losing approximately 2000 members per year, although since then its membership figures have stabilized at around 33,000 persons. Significantly, Statistics Canada reports (2001, 2011) that about 25% of people in the province consider themselves Anglican which translates to around 60,000 Anglicans on the Avalon Peninsula alone, twice the number the diocese has in official membership.¹ **We have done a poor job of attracting new members to our churches in this diocese.** The first graph below shows church membership data for all three dioceses together not adjusted for overall population changes.



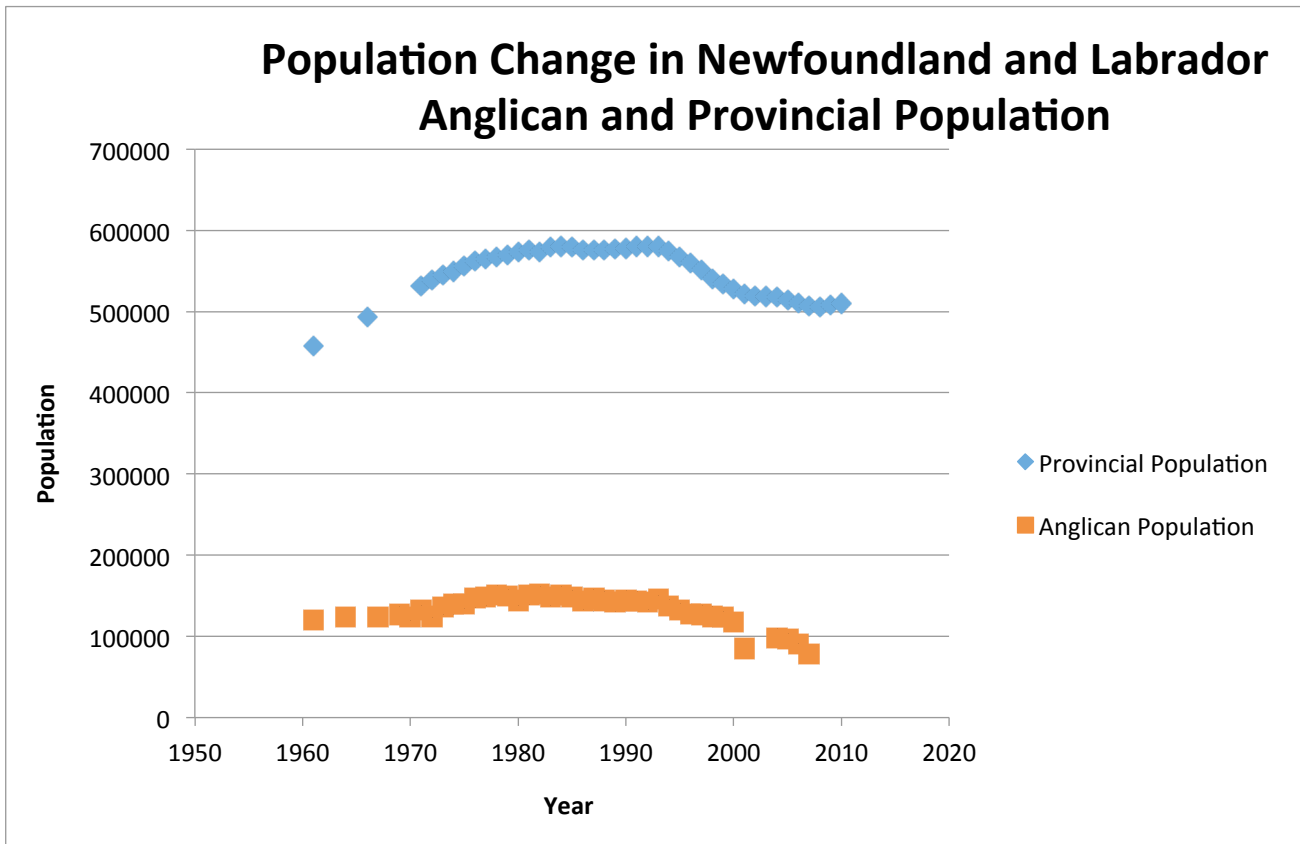
In the next graph, in order to visualize better the relative rates of decline, the percentages of the respective populations which identify with the Anglican Church have been determined with respect to an index value, in this case the first year for which data were available for each region. Newfoundland and Labrador will be compared with the Anglican Church in the rest of Canada and the Episcopal Church in the United States of America (ECUSA). The next graph shows the change in the respective populations of the churches using this method. This permits the overall trend to be seen without consideration of the populations at the beginning of the study period. Essentially, the population for any given year may be found by multiplying the index value for that year by the population for the first year under study. The advantage of this method is that the trends all begin from the same point.

¹ The *Pastoral Care Newsletter* of Eastern Health (May 2014) shows that 25% of hospital admissions identify as Anglican.



The membership trends showing decline in Canada and the United States are fairly similar to one another. The trend in Newfoundland and Labrador, while also showing decline, is not as steep as that for Canada or the United States until after 2001. Subsequent to 2001, four additional data points are included for the three dioceses in Newfoundland and Labrador (2004, 2005, 2006 and 2007) demonstrating a significant departure from the prior trends and a steeper membership decline. This rapid decline suggests the presence of other factors affecting the data and the most likely explanation is that the drop in numbers represents a demographic echo of outmigration. This effect can be elucidated with the aid of the following graph which shows the absolute populations of both the province of Newfoundland and Labrador and the Anglican Church within the province. The province experienced significant decline and movement in population between 1992 and 2008, with the population beginning to grow slightly after 2008.²

² If we are to believe the latest figures from the Conference Board of Canada, the Newfoundland and Labrador population will actually decline again in the next 20 years to 482000 by 2035.



The steeper decline in church membership after 2001 reflects the final impact of the general population decline that began in the 1990s. Although Newfoundlanders and Labradorians left the province in great numbers throughout the 1990s many of them remained loyal to their home church, stayed on parish rolls, and contributed financially for years afterward. Also, in many cases it was only one member of the family (traditionally the father) who left to work and sent money home so that the children could finish school. The hope for some was that the Groundfish Moratorium would be temporary and people could resume their life. Only in the years following 2001 did many expatriate Newfoundlanders and Labradorians finally decide not to return home again, ended their membership in their church at home, and joined churches where they were then living if they so chose.

In the decade following 2000 many parishes also began to enact more stringent procedures for defining exactly who is on their parish rolls as parishes began to consolidate in order to handle the effects of the decline in population. In many parishes the official membership list was tied for the first time to the names of those who contributed financially to the church. During this period large numbers of individuals and families were removed from the parish membership lists who had effectively ceased affiliation for years.

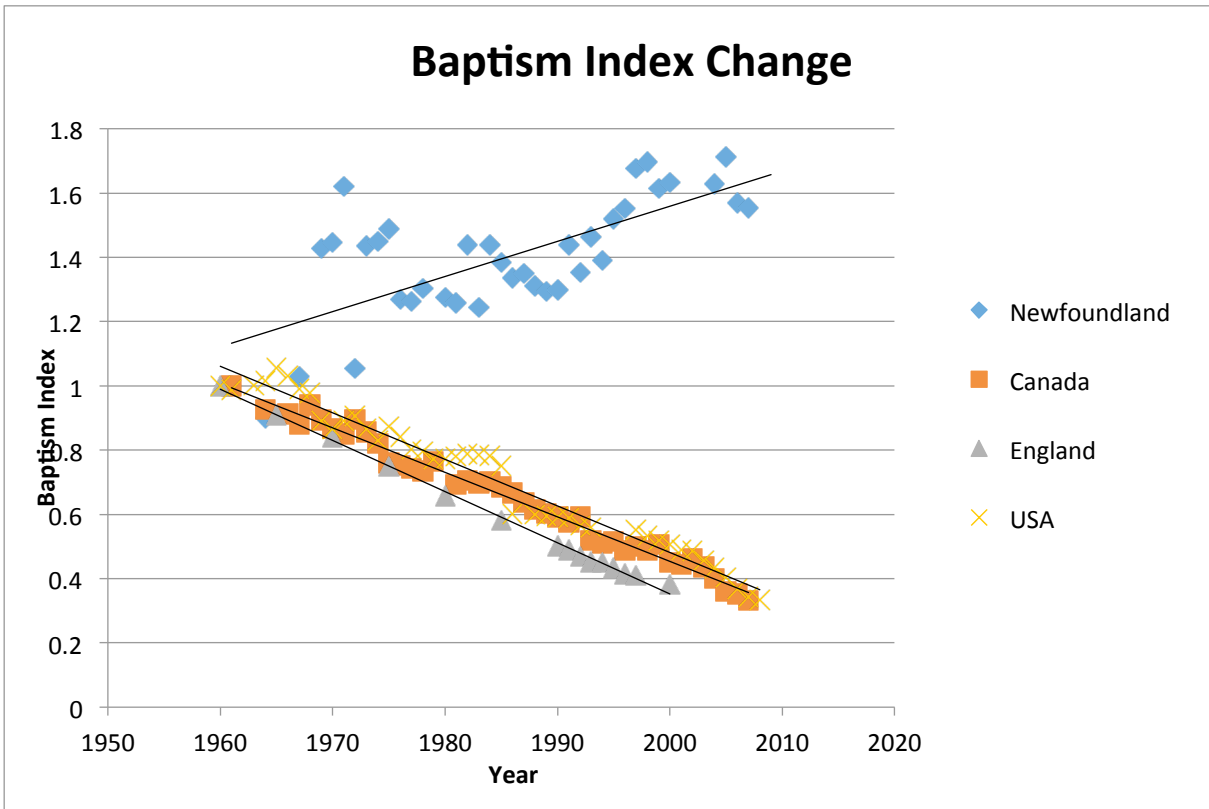
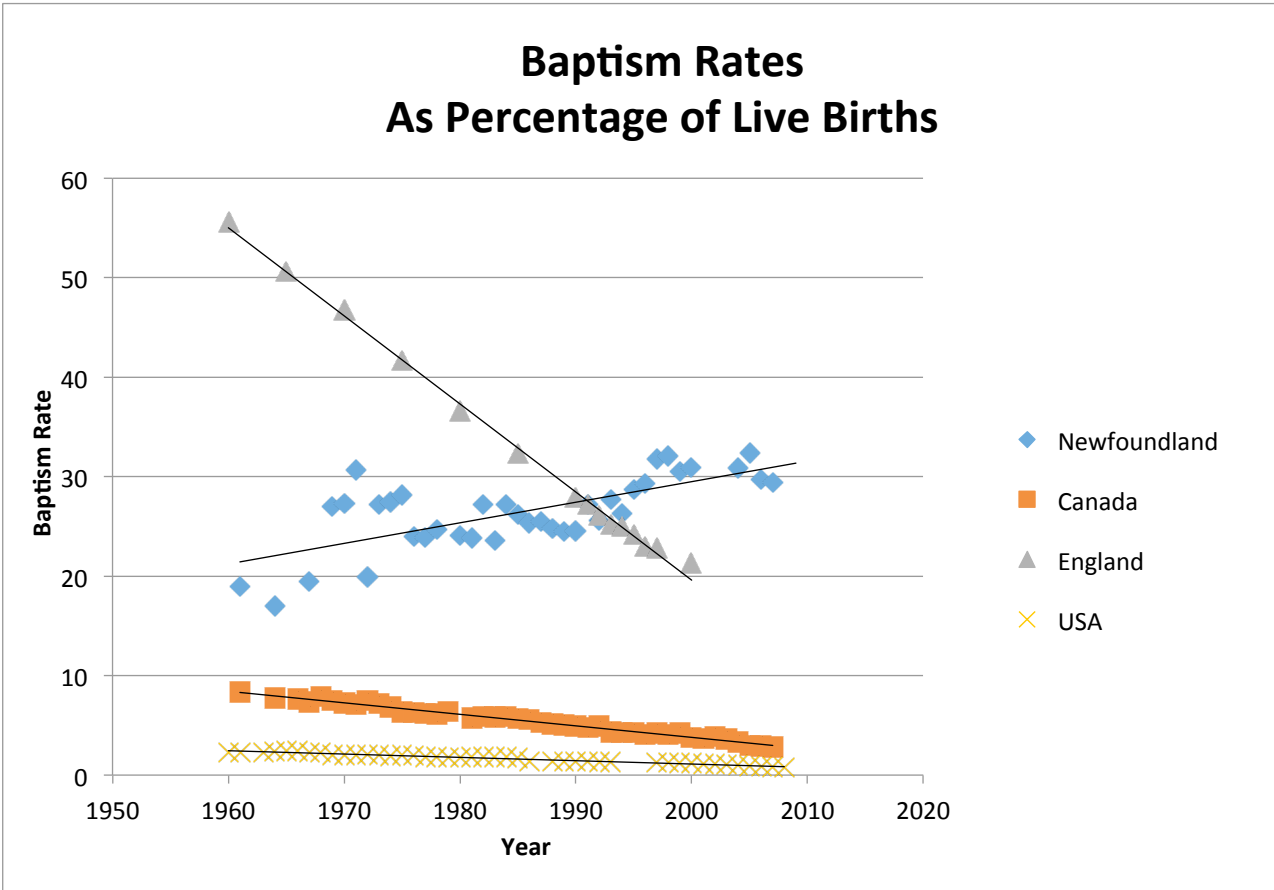
“A Peculiar People”: Baptisms, Weddings and Funerals in the NL Anglican Church

There is, however, some good news. An analysis of the membership figures for all three dioceses combined reveals some very unique patterns and trends that distinguish the Newfoundland and Labrador church from Anglican Churches in the rest of Canada, the United States and England. Although declines were expected here because of the loss of provincial population in the 1990s discussed above, what is most interesting is how those declines impacted the church. While there has been clear membership loss, this same rate of membership loss has not been reflected in baptism, wedding and funeral rates for the dioceses. In fact, adjusted for overall population change, rates of baptisms, weddings and funerals have actually increased. The following graphs show the same metrics for the Anglican Church in Newfoundland and Labrador – membership, baptism, confirmation, weddings, and funerals – adjusted for population and compared with available information from other national churches to illustrate the unique reality in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Baptisms

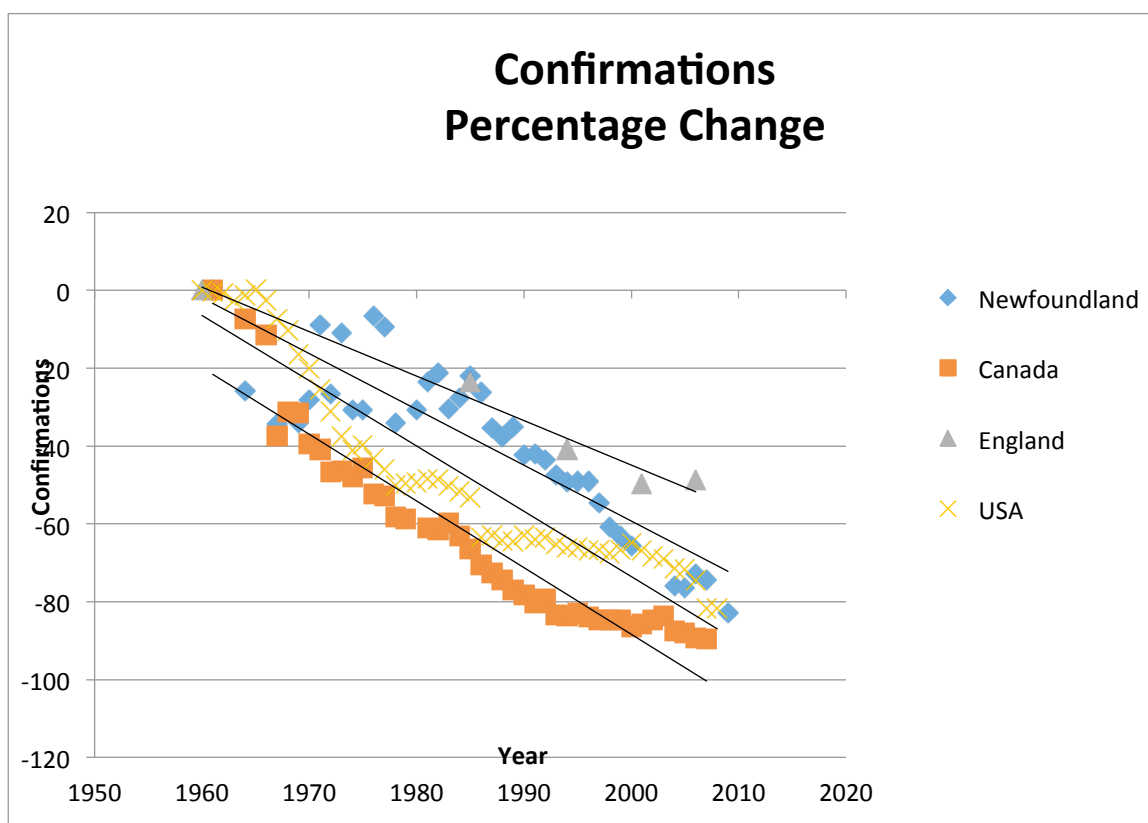
The next metric used to evaluate affiliation and participation with the Anglican Church was the rate at which baptisms are performed. It may be found on the following page. For each church considered the number of baptisms was compared to the number of live births, in order to give an indication of the percentage of babies who are baptized in the Anglican Church. Three of the churches studied – the Church of England, the Anglican Church of Canada and the Episcopal Church of the United States of America – showed a declining baptism rate. The rate of baptisms in the Anglican Church of Canada declined from 8.36% of all live births in 1961 to 3.61% of all live births in 2001. The Episcopal Church in the United States showed a similar decline from 2.31% in 1960 to 1.17% in 2000. The rate is significantly more severe in England where the percentage of babies who were baptized in the first 12 months of their lives has declined from 55.61% in 1960 to 21.3% in 2000.

However, the rate of baptisms in the Anglican Church in Newfoundland and Labrador increased. In 1961, the percentage of babies born in Newfoundland and Labrador who were baptized in the Anglican Church was 18.92%. Over a 40-year period from 1961 to 2001, the rates of baptism in Newfoundland and Labrador increased from 18.92% of the population to 30.07%. The trend may be continued in Newfoundland and Labrador beyond 40 years, with a rate of 30.64% in 2005 demonstrating a four-year increase of 2%. The change in baptism rates may be seen more easily on the baptism index graph. Although it may be argued that the increase in baptism rates in the Anglican Church in Newfoundland and Labrador has been somewhat exaggerated due to severely declining birth rates among the Roman Catholic population in the province, such a decline among Roman Catholics may also be seen in the United States, Canada and England. The data still indicate a significant difference between Newfoundland and Labrador and the other areas under study.



Confirmations

The third metric considered to measure affiliation and participation with the Anglican Church was that of confirmation. It was seen that confirmation rates have declined for all four of the churches studied. Considering a 40-year period from 1961 to 2001 in the case of Canada and Newfoundland and Labrador and from 1960 to 2000 in the case of the United States and England, the decrease in confirmation rates seen in Newfoundland and Labrador was consistent with the rates in the other nations, with Newfoundland and Labrador showing a 65.5% decrease in the number of people being confirmed yearly.

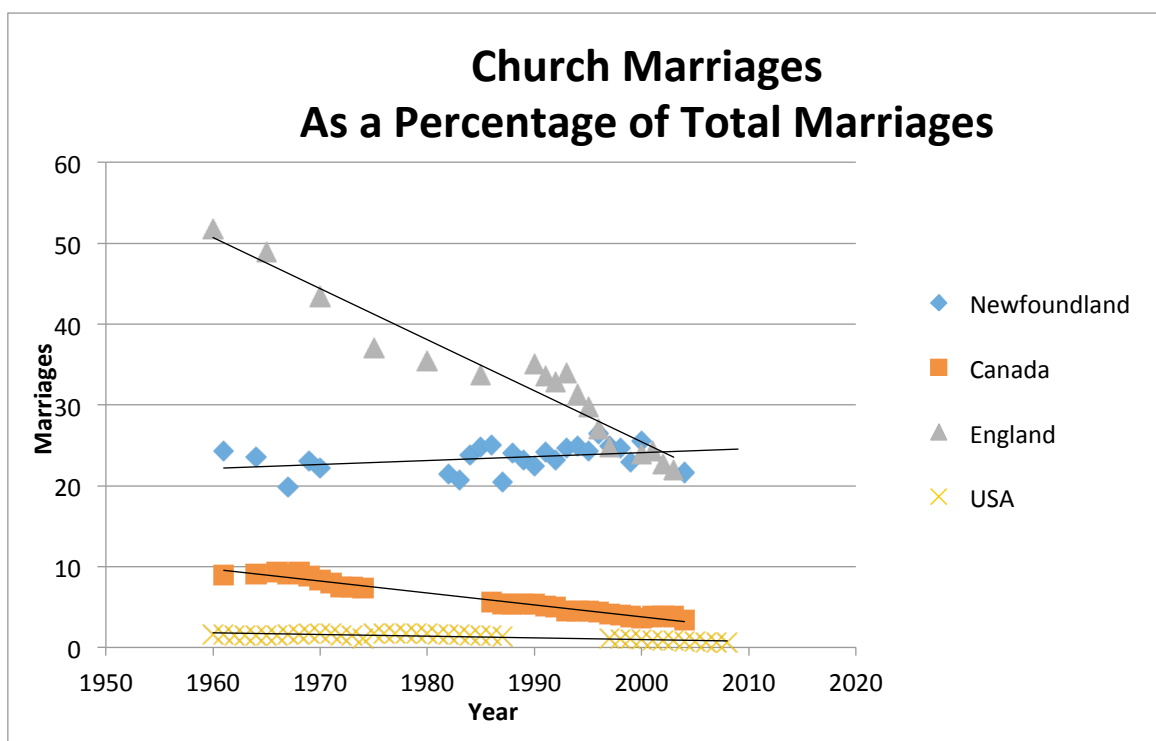


It should be noted that this figure is different in nature from the others used in this study, in that it is no way corrected for population change and the percent change in the total number of people confirmed each year was used. This arises from the lack of any corresponding metric to which confirmation may be directly compared.³ That said, the Church of England has seen a decrease in confirmation of 49.7% during the 40-year study period. Similarly, from 1961 to 2001, the percentage of the population undergoing confirmation in any one particular year in Canada dropped by 86.5% and the proportion in the United States dropped by 64.9%.

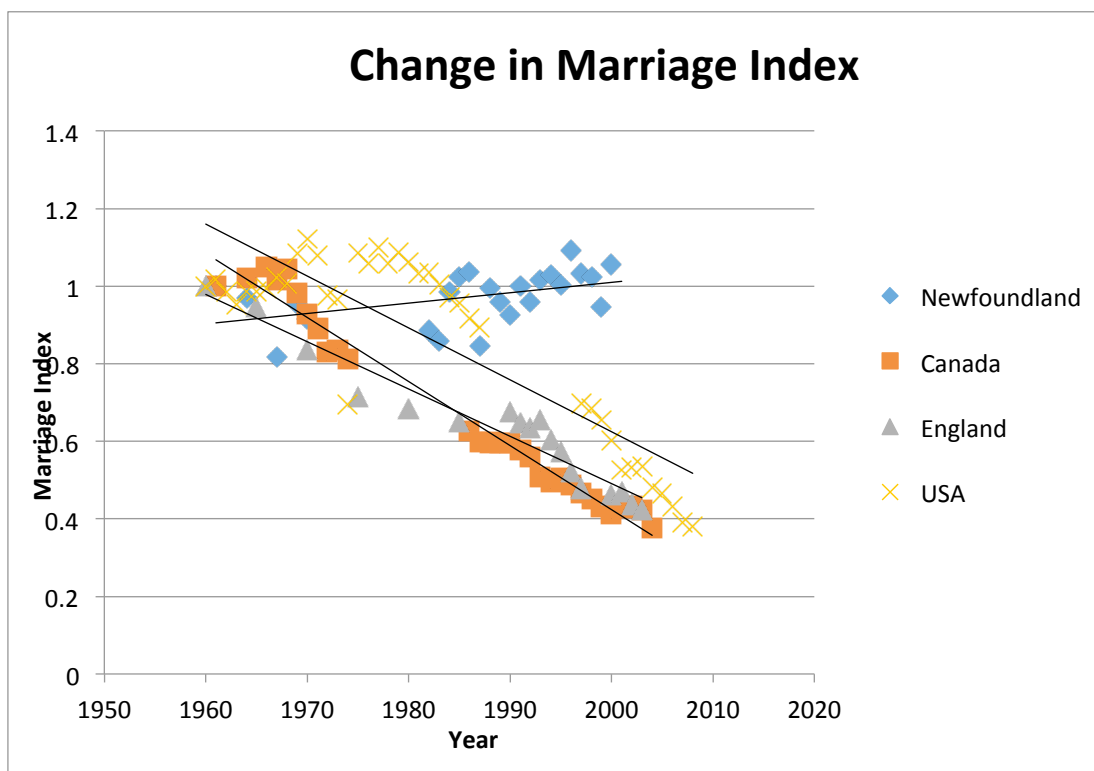
³ There were also changes in the practice of confirmation among the churches considered over this period that may have contributed to declining confirmation rates. For example, in all three Newfoundland and Labrador dioceses it became no longer necessary to be confirmed in order to share in Holy Communion.

Marriages

The next two metrics used – marriages and funerals – indicated a similar pattern to that of baptisms with the Anglican Church in Newfoundland and Labrador showing quite different outcomes from the other churches considered. Measurement of the rates of marriage within the Anglican Church as a percentage of the total marriages within each region demonstrate a different pattern between Newfoundland and Labrador and the other three regions (Canada, the US and the UK).



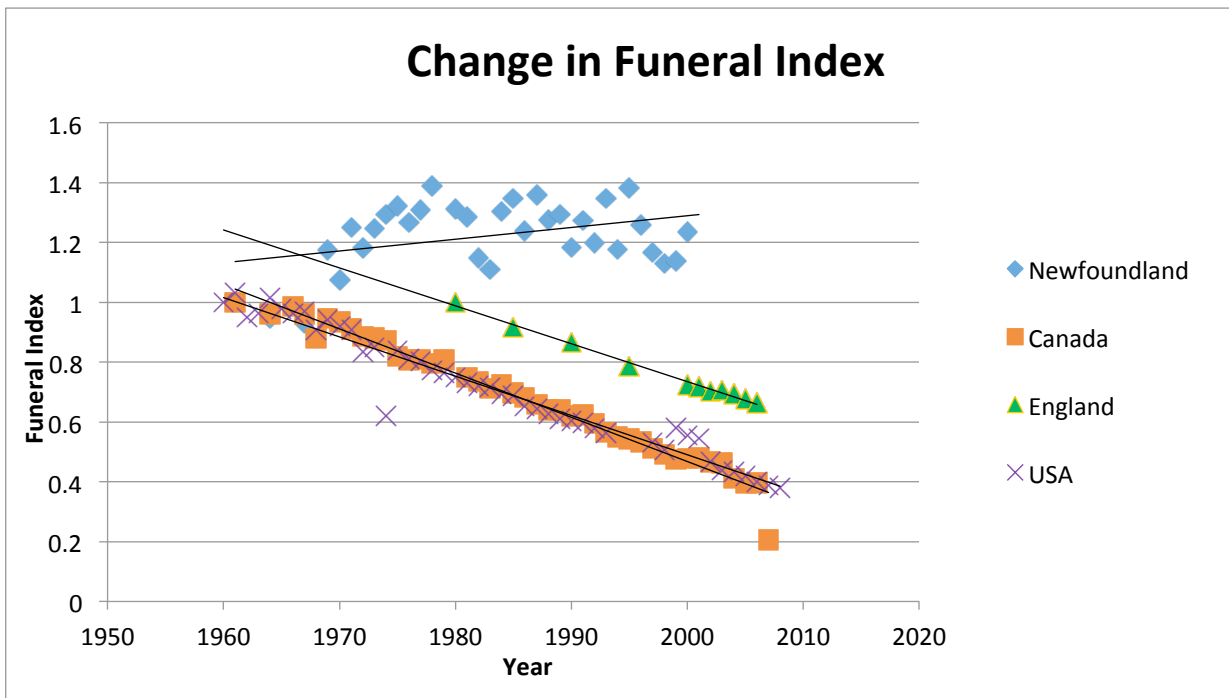
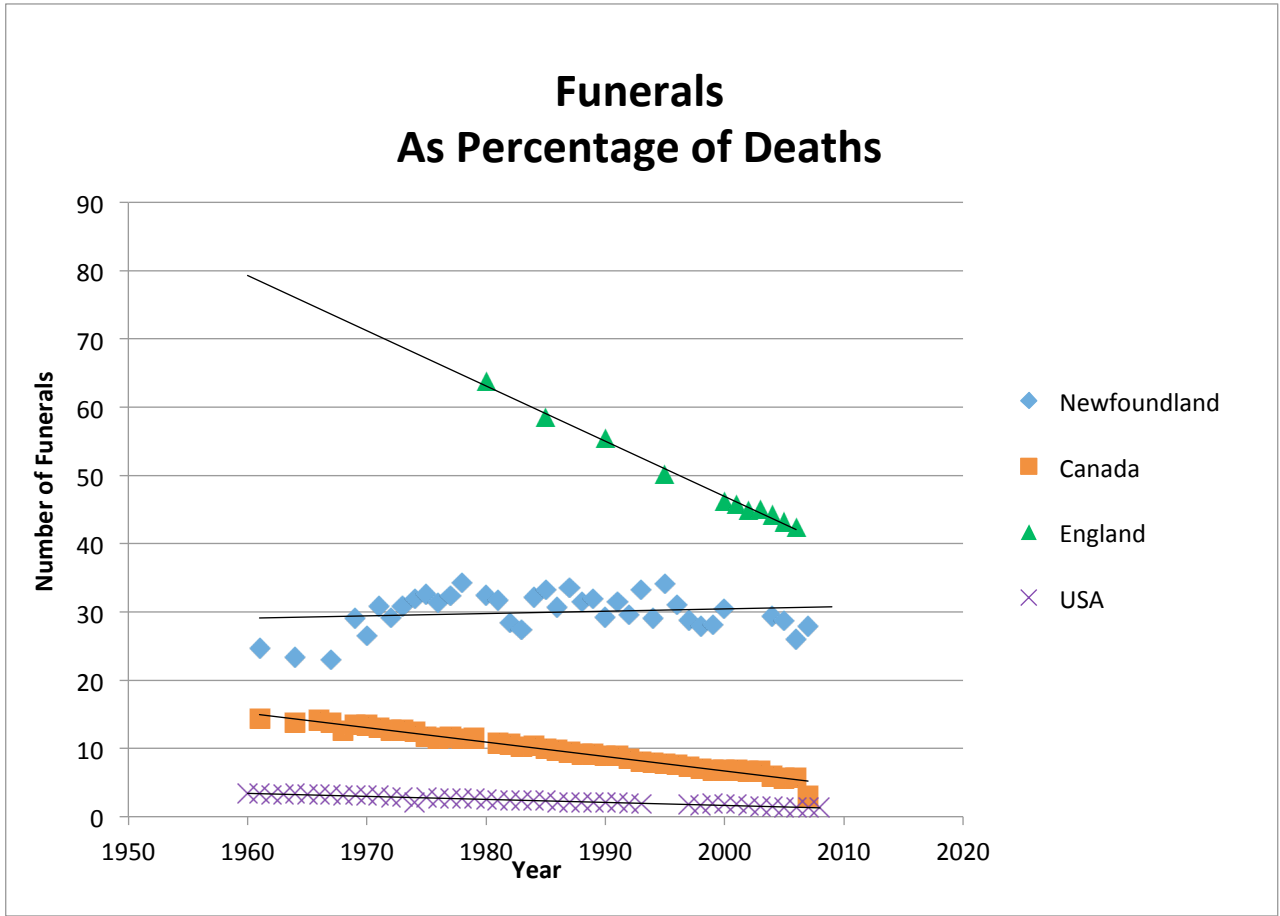
The percentage of marriages performed by the Anglican Church in Newfoundland and Labrador increased from 1961 to 2001 by 14%, from 24.2% to 27.6% of the total marriages performed within the province. This is in stark contrast to trends seen elsewhere toward civil marriages. It should be noted that civil marriages have been legal in Newfoundland and Labrador since 1976 and same-sex marriages have been legal in the province since 2004.



From 1960 to 2000, the percentage of all marriages performed within the Church of England declined from 51.81% to 23.76%. As with baptisms, the Church of England had the highest rate of church affiliation according to this metric in 1960, but declined to levels below that of Newfoundland and Labrador by the end of the study period. The rates of decline with respect to church marriages in Canada and the US closely mirrors that of the Church of England, with Canada exhibiting a 59% decline in church marriages from 8.93% in 1961 to 3.69% of all marriages in 2001. The United States demonstrates a decline of 40% from 1960 to 2000, which is a change from 1.56% to 0.94% of all marriages being performed in a church. The changes within each Church can be seen on the above graph, which shows the trend as a change on the original or index value.

Funerals

As with marriages and baptisms, the proportion of deaths which result in an Anglican funeral has decreased in Canada, the United States and England but not in Newfoundland and Labrador. Consistent with the other measures of church involvement, the rate of decrease was more pronounced in Canada than in the United States, at 53% over 40 years versus 45% over 40 years. Again, as with other metrics, the rate was initially several times higher in Canada than in the United States, with 14.32% of all funerals in Canada taking place in the Anglican Church in 1960 and falling to 6.71% in 2001. In the United States the decline was from 3.36% in 1960 to 1.86% in 2000. Conversely, the proportion in Newfoundland and Labrador increased from 24.69% in 1961 to 28.38% in 2001. This represents a growth of 15% in the proportion of funerals performed in the Anglican Church in Newfoundland and Labrador. The trends are more clearly visible when viewed compared to a time series value in the second graph below.



A Different Kind of Decline: Is the Glass half-full or half-empty?

The statistical data presented in this chapter on the Episcopal Church of the United States of America, the Church of England and the Anglican Church of Canada exclusive of Newfoundland and Labrador demonstrate significant patterns of institutional decline across all the metrics considered: membership, baptisms, confirmations, weddings and funerals. The Anglican Church in Newfoundland and Labrador, on the other hand, reveals a deviation from the other churches considered in that it has not experienced the same level of decline with the exception of official membership figures and confirmations. The figures from the Newfoundland and Labrador Church as a whole after 2001 reveal that even as overall membership seems to have dropped, other measures of church affiliation have remained remarkably stable. Curiously, there seems to be no direct relationship between decline in membership and continued desire for the pastoral and liturgical offices of the Church, suggesting that even if fewer people are appearing on parish and diocesan membership lists, the relationship of the overall population to the Church has not diminished to the same extent. Apparent membership decline cannot be correlated with a decline in those seeking the ministry of the Church. If we are to remember the words of Rowan Williams earlier, we may conclude that in Newfoundland and Labrador the religious memory remains strong. Yes, we may have lost thousands of people from our core membership but they have not left when it comes to other types of affiliation and participation with the Anglican Church. The evidence shows that they are not exactly gone and certainly not forgotten. The following chart demonstrates this resilience in the Diocese of Eastern Newfoundland and Labrador over 7 years between 2006 and 2012. Note that the numbers are not adjusted for overall population change because the provincial population cannot be matched precisely against the boundaries of the Diocese of Eastern Newfoundland and Labrador.⁴

Statistics for the Diocese of Eastern Newfoundland and Labrador

	<u>2006</u>	<u>2007</u>	<u>2008</u>	<u>2009</u>	<u>2010</u>	<u>2011</u>	<u>2012</u>
Membership	41907	38884	33132	34342	32684	34214	34029
Baptisms	769	706	705	731	709	649	642
Confirmations	502	465	496	408	422	308	437
Weddings	280	284	255	251	239	219	224
Funerals	540	545	556	539	492	507	566

A key distinction to be emphasized at this point is that even though many of those availing of baptisms, weddings and even funerals in Newfoundland and Labrador are not officially members of the Church, they still feel enough of a connection to the institution that they wish to share in those pastoral offices. In fact, there are probably two distinct types of membership at play within the Anglican Church in Newfoundland and Labrador between those who are officially counted and who financially support the church (“envelope subscribers”), and those who are not officially counted and do not necessarily financially support the church in any regular way but still claim membership. The first group seems to be declining while the second is increasing. It is very significant to note that the sacraments of baptism and marriage are most strongly administered to those of a younger age who are not core members corresponding to the 25-40 year old group and their children.

⁴ The decline in numbers of baptisms, confirmations and weddings from 2006 to 2012 can be attributed in large part to fewer babies, fewer youth of confirmation age, and fewer weddings in the general provincial population.

The Anglican Church will endure but what kind of Church will it be?

The empirical data presented reveals patterns of affiliation and participation with the Anglican Church in Newfoundland and Labrador that are different from those with Anglican Churches in other parts of the world. The evidence suggests strongly that there is a retained identification with the Church beyond the institutional parameters of the Church among those who for whatever reason no longer appear on parish and diocesan rolls. The patterns shows that the Church continues to have a role around times of transitions and celebrations in life for them but not an ongoing role in the ordinary and familiar rhythms of life.

In my opinion, this indicates that the reservoir of goodwill toward the Anglican Church and the desire for the ministry of the church at times of deep significance in individual lives remains strong. The fact that there has not been appreciable decline in the key pastoral ministries of baptism, marriage and funerals speaks to a continuing connection with the church even among those who, for whatever reason, have chosen not to remain or become full and active members. I define them as passive members and there is much for the Church to learn from knowing this group better because they represent the most hopeful source of new membership and growth in the years ahead. Although many have declined official and active membership they have not left in the way Anglicans in the rest of Canada, the United States and England have done so. The very best investment in its future the Anglican Church in Newfoundland and Labrador can make today is to engage deeply with this group and discover who they really are. We may even discover that those who seemingly have turned their back on organized religion continue to believe at a deeper level that the Church still contains the mystery of all that is good in human life. Some of them may be poisoned by the failures of the Christian Church and yet have not entirely abandoned the belief that there is something very good about this community and something worth knowing, if only they could find their way back.

Sadly, sometimes, we have not only failed to attract people to the Church, we have sometimes administered a vaccine of sorts that prevents them from ever getting involved. And that happens when we do not make room for the newcomer and do not seek to meet their needs. We administer a vaccine against full involvement in the life of the church community when our energies and budgets are overwhelmingly directed to maintaining buildings and properties with little for direct ministry to children, youth and young families. An analysis of parish annual reports for 2012 shows that parishes across this diocese spent 16% as much on children and youth as they did on repairs and maintenance. For every \$100 spent on repairs and maintenance, \$16 was spent on children and youth. Although incomplete, the reports we have for 2013 show the ratio to be 17%.⁵ And we prevent full involvement when the only things outsiders know of our community are stories of fighting and squabbling within or scandals involving clergy.

I've spent my entire ordained ministry in the Diocese of Eastern Newfoundland and Labrador, actually my entire life. I think I know this church well. I've worked across this Diocese in the past and now I find myself blessed with the unique perspective that comes by being the Diocesan Bishop. And while I find many encouraging signs around me I will tell you that I also find a diocese that is tired and anxious in too many places. I see it in the faces of our people today when I look into their eyes. Too many people tell me they are tired of trying to "keep things going" and afraid of what the future may bring. Some of our people have no real

⁵ Although it can be argued that money spent on repairs and maintenance benefits children and youth, that is not the same as investing directly in programming, staffing and the training and equipping of leaders for our children and youth. If we compare the money allocated for children and youth to total parish expenditures, it constitutes less than 1%.

hope and no real expectation for a better future. What has happened? To quote the motto of the Church of St James in Piccadilly: “Christ did not come so that we could have Church and that more often. He came so that we could have life and that more abundantly.” So where is that more abundant life? Some writers suggest that joy is the real secret to evangelism. So where is that joy?

Some of us have made the maintenance of what we have the priority in the face of the changes around us. But we do not have the core membership to do that everywhere any longer and what we are doing now may not be sustainable over the next decade. God calls us to be people of life and joy and not caretakers of the past. With all of the things that have died around us, perhaps a few more things must also die before new life can come. And when our focus becomes that of caretakers we might even become guilty of a modern form of idolatry without even recognizing it. When we think of idolatry we think of the Old Testament understanding of the worship of idols but today idolatry takes another form in the Church. The theologian Karl Barth updated this understanding of idolatry and said that when the Church ceases to be about transformation and renewal and clings to past practice we become worshippers of idols. When we substitute local, historical human ideals for the purposes of God we are guilty of idolatry. Idolatry is always the worship of dead things.

Two Challenges Today

I want to borrow a term from geology that illustrates something of what we face today. In geology, a fault is a crack in the earth’s crust that can potentially shift or break even further creating an earthquake and devastation above. A fault line is the surface trace of a fault that is visible to us on the earth’s surface. I believe there are two major fault lines running across our church today that have the potential to break this community even further if we are not mindful of them. They are **Membership** and **Ministry**.

Membership: A Missing Generation

The most serious fault line in our Church today, in my opinion, concerns our membership and the fact that we have become a rapidly aging church with one, and possibly two, generations largely missing from our pews and from our lay church leadership. As noted earlier, after years of steep decline, our official membership today is stable at around 33,000 persons. But what this apparent good news masks is the fact that 70-80% of our core worshipping membership is composed of people 50 years of age and older.⁶ The 25 to 45-year-old age group with their children are hugely underrepresented in our active worshipping community. Not that there is anything wrong with so many older people in our churches but unfortunately their needs are different from the needs of younger people with children. We cannot simply become a church of the older set. An inclusive and broad church will reflect the wider population around it and unfortunately we are not doing that very well.

To quote from a previous section, distinct from the other from the other dioceses in our province, there has been minimal population loss within our boundaries during the 1990’s and we even experienced a slight increase with more than 50% of the Newfoundland and Labrador population residing on the Avalon Peninsula today. But not only has the diocese lost half its members since being set up in 1976, it also failed to increase its membership during the 1990s and following when many Newfoundlanders and Labradorians moved there from other parts of the province. While baptisms, confirmations, marriages and funerals are not showing appreciable

⁶ About 40% of the general population in NL is 50 years of age and older. Fully 60% of the province is younger than 50.

decline today as a percent of overall population, the Diocese of Eastern Newfoundland and Labrador did not attract new members. On the Northeast Avalon in particular the overall population has more than doubled in places but our church membership has not grown and our biggest losses have been among the younger generations. This is what really scares me! It seems to me that the Sesame Street song, “**Who are the people in your neighbourhood?**” needs to become our song at this time in our history. As your Bishop I have to strongly suggest to you that starting today, in every single parish and congregation of our diocese, every single decision you make as you move forward, from budgets to times of services to programs, considers your children and youth and young families. How are their needs reflected in your decisions? And from now on, with no exceptions, you and I must also consider the needs of the younger generations in the selection and appointment of clergy.

Ministry: A Church Operating at Two Speeds

The second fault line today in our Church concerns our ministry. The Church across our Diocese is operating at two speeds with some parishes and congregations actively engaging in mission-based programming and others just trying to survive. Some places are actively planning for their children and youth and young families and others do not even talk about them. Remember what I said about seeing too many tired and anxious faces? This is a factor of both the vision of the community and the allocation of resources. When our maintenance and cemetery budgets vastly exceed our budgets for children and youth ministry we need to look at what we are doing. Our space today is more than adequate for our worshipping congregations but often not enough for programming, service and fellowship if our churches are to be more than a one-day-a-week, one-hour-a-week stop for our people. We have too many small communities that only meet for worship once a week on Sunday and not nearly often enough during the week for service, learning and fellowship. We need more communities that meet *during* the week to break bread together and engage in discipleship in the world. In some places we are working hard on our inner life and in some places we are not. We have Adult Christian Education Programs and Bible Studies in most parishes but not everywhere. Sometimes we do very well at running through the motions externally but how well do we pay attention to the internal matters of our spiritual life?

I believe that Christian Hospitality should be face of our church to the world today as it transforms every part of our relationship with the world around us. It seems to me that the time has come for us to practice a ministry of hospitality in the church in a whole new way today. This is not a new concept; in fact it is quite ancient and medieval. It is just an updated version of the hospitality practiced by monasteries and convents centuries ago. A traveller who came to such a place in the course of their journey could be assured of a safe lodging for the night, a warm meal, and a blessing in the morning as they continued on their way. There was no expectation that the traveller would stay and join the community although many did. There was simply the commitment by the community to care for the traveller with a compassion and love modelled upon that of Jesus himself. You *can* change a life with a cup of tea and a raisin bun.

Bishop J.A.T. Robinson said that the Christian Church should be soft at the edges and firm at the center. Where people first meet us should be a place of warm and friendly encounter and only after they grow in the faith should they learn the deeper truths of Christianity. William Templeton said it well when he wrote that the Church is the only cooperative society in the world that does not exist for the sake of its members but for the sake of those who do not yet belong to it.

Our ministry to children, youth and young families must become a priority everywhere. We have abandoned it in church after church because there are not enough children or adult leaders to make it happen. Five communities with five children in each will not produce five Sunday Schools but if those five found a way to come together for the sake of their children alone you would have 25 children together and can you imagine the children's ministry you can have then? That's not to say the churches have to be closed but it is to say that the way in which our people meet for worship and service and learning needs to be looked at. There is something to be said for an Anglican Church in every town but not at the expense of our ministry to children and young persons and their families. Have we ever thought about partnering with other denominations on this one ministry for the sake of all our children? I continue to hear of Sunday Schools where most of what the children do is color pictures with leaders who are not trained or equipped and who have no budget for their ministry. We can offer our children so very much more! Every church cannot offer good programs for children and youth but more of our churches can do that with the right leadership and planning and sharing. The theological education of our ordained clergy and lay leaders must take this into account. We cannot simply train people to be caretakers of what we have. We must train and equip people to grow what we have in a changing world.

We might even have to change the way we think of the church. Is it?

Church = Building + Priest + Sunday Services

... OR ...

Church = Community + Faith + Discipleship

It's Planting Season

It's now May and those of us who are gardeners are getting ready to plant. Our church needs to do the same. We are at our best when we are planting and growing. Some traditional communities will survive and flourish but sometimes new communities must be born. These communities need not be geographical or based upon traditional styles of leadership or even a building but will always meet the needs of those around them. I remind you that according to Statistics Canada there are over 60,000 self-identified Anglicans on the Avalon Peninsula alone making us potentially one of the 3 largest dioceses in Canada. A rich mission field of 30,000 new and renewed members exists all around us. Our "mission field" is not just overseas but also in our own backyard but we must be deliberate in reaching out to them.

And we do that by being the church in the world; by being the church in the world in all of its richness and messiness and happiness and sadness and cheerfulness and scruffiness. Final perfection of this community rests with God in the fullness of his kingdom but in the meantime what we have is all we've got and we've got a lot! We are called to serve God through his Church – the Body of Christ – and love it and grow to the best of our abilities. And I sincerely believe that the very best hope we can impart to our people will come through the regeneration of our congregations and communities in healthy ways.

Historically, we have always been a church of the people, providing places of worship and pastoral care all along our vast coastline and in the few inland towns we have. We are a church that exists close to the population

around it, close to the land, close to the sea. And when it comes to clergy, we have had no history of producing great teachers and theologians and writers and liturgists and musicians although there have been a few. We have had a great history of producing pastors; clergy who have understood that their role was to draw near to their flock, get to know them by name, and walk humbly with them along their journey. We have always been a pastoral church. We still are. We should be proud of that role. We are a church that responds well to leadership when it is accountable, energetic and visionary. We are a church that stumbles when that leadership is missing.

A report released this year in England called *“From Anecdote to Evidence: Findings from the Church Growth Research Programme 2011-2013”* considered the elements that spurred church growth within the Church of England. The study revealed that there is no one, single or simple answer to church growth. However, they did uncover some general fruitful approaches that thriving churches had adopted. They were, first of all:

- **Good leadership!** ... that was followed by ...
- **A clear mission and purpose**
- **Willingness to self-reflect, to change and adapt according to context**
- **Involvement of lay members**
- **Being intentional in prioritizing growth**
- **Being intentional in chosen style of worship**
- **Being intentional in nurturing disciples**

One of the study’s authors, Professor David Voassaid, “The road to growth depends on the context, and what works in one place may not work in another. What seems crucial is that congregations are constantly engaged in reflection; churches cannot soar on autopilot. Growth is a product of good leadership (lay and ordained) working with a willing set of churchgoers in a favorable environment.”

In other words, there is not one story and not one solution. Every situation is local and particular and that needs to be central to our solution. And I don’t think we even need to look outside ourselves for solutions. I think that the collective wisdom of our community can be sufficient if only we can come together. And let us base our actions upon the evidence. We are often much better at opinion-based decision-making rather than evidence-based decision-making. No longer should groups of people get together to make decisions with their minds already made up. Let us look at the situation before us and research and investigate before deciding. Let us make the Sesame Street song, ***Who are the people in your neighborhood?*** our song for the next few years.

There is an old adage that all politics is local, because at the end of it all, what matters most to the average, ordinary person is what they see on their table and share with their families and friends. And here is where we can find hope for the new day; by renewing and creating healthy, loving, fresh, and vibrant communities:

- Communities that make a difference in the lives of those who belong and also those who do not yet belong.
- Communities that leaven and flavor the world around them.
- Communities that draw others to them with the promise of acceptance and compassion and forgiveness and life and transformation.

To quote one theologian, I believe the church should not be afraid to “love wastefully” and to pour its love into the world to all who come its way. My message to the Parish of St. Michael and All Angels when they opened their new building was that they should not simply proclaim the Good News or tell others about the Good News but **Be the Good News** in their community. And to paraphrase the words of Bishop Lesslie [*sic*] Newbigin: “I find no trace in the New Testament and Early Church of a community anxious about how big it was or how fast it was growing or whether it was successful or unsuccessful, popular or unpopular, but only an abiding concern over whether it was living in faithfulness to the Gospel.”

Let us live in faithfulness to that Gospel. We are a Church drenched in God’s Grace. Let us act like we know that to be true and trust the Gospel to reshape us. If you truly love this Church, you will want it to become more than it is and all that it can be.

And to help us begin again I want to propose something fresh. I want to invite a letter from each and every parish of our diocese by this fall and in that letter I want you to reflect upon what is the most important part of your story before telling me about something you have decided to let go of in your faith community and something new you have decided to take up. It’s entirely up to you if you want to do this but I will respond to every letter. But I should warn you that I will be asking you about your relationship with the Gospel and with God as a serving and worshipping community. I will ask you about your ministry to children and youth and young families. Perhaps we might even begin a correspondence between Bishop and Parish that will last until the end of my episcopacy.

Acknowledging your membership in the Body of Christ,

- **What is the most important part of your congregation or parish’s story?**
- **What is the most important change that has taken place in your congregation or parish in the past five years?**
- **What is the most important change that needs to take place in your congregation or parish in the next five years?**

And may God richly bless us along the way.