

# **Bishop's Charge to Synod 2016**

**A Talk Given by the Rt. Rev. Dr. Geoff Peddle**

**The Twenty-Ninth Diocesan Synod of the  
Diocese of Eastern Newfoundland and Labrador**

**April 21-24, 2016**



**Parish of the Ascension  
Parish of the Good Shepherd  
Parish of St. Mary the Virgin**

***The Church has left the Building:  
Recognizing the Gospel beyond the Visible Church***

My Dear People,

It is with a great sense of thanksgiving that I speak to you this morning. This day finds us in the glow of our celebration last evening as six Deacons were ordained for service in our church. Today, we begin a different kind of work as the People of God in the Diocese of Eastern Newfoundland and Labrador gathered as the Twenty-Ninth Diocesan Synod to take council for the Body of Christ, the Church, in this place.

The theme of our synod this year is, “***The Church has left the Building: Recognizing the Gospel beyond the Visible Church,***” and delegates and observers from across this vast diocese embracing both Labrador and Newfoundland are here as the Body of Christ. We gather not as members of our home churches representing only their concerns but are now members of synod with a responsibility to make decisions for the whole church. My Charge will be distributed to you as a printed document later this morning and accompanying it will be a **Record of Episcopal Acts and Diocesan Statistics** for the period from January 2014 to April 2016. The Response to my Charge will not be in the usual manner of having a designated group draft a reply but will in the form of an open forum on Sunday morning where any member of Synod is free to express their views.

This is our first synod to be planned entirely online through the technology of “*GoToMeeting*.” At no time did the entire planning committee meet face to face but instead met online regularly. I thank Canon David Burrows for his leadership in bringing us together in that way from across our vast diocese and commend the use of such technologies for our church in the future. *Ex Officio* members of the synod organizing committee have been The Venerable Samuel Rose, Chancellor Brad Wicks QC, and myself, with the following Archdeaconry representatives:

**Avalon Archdeaconry:**

Deborah Pantin  
The Venerable Charlene Taylor (Secretary)

**Trinity/Conception/Placentia Archdeaconry:**

Christine Lynch  
The Rev. Eli Evans

**Labrador Archdeaconry:**

Sherry Newman  
The Rev. Jolene Peters

I welcome special visitors to this year’s synod and they include partners in our work. Those partners are both faith-based and secular agencies and organizations who share with us a passion for community and justice. We welcome Bishop Lawrence Provenzano of the Diocese of Long Island in New York State who will be with us throughout and speak at our dinner on Saturday night and also preside at the Celebration of Holy Eucharist on Sunday morning. We welcome Ms. Leslie Giddings of the Diocese of Ottawa who will facilitate much of our conversation over the next three days and who will preach at our closing service on Sunday. I send greetings from the Diocese of Eastern Newfoundland and Labrador to Queen’s College as it celebrates 175 years of service in 2016. I also send greetings to the Church Lads’ Brigade as they prepare to celebrate 125 years of service in 2017.

The fact that our synod this year began with an Ordination of Deacons to a ministry of service is appropriate in light of the work before us as we reflect upon our three themes of **Dreaming, Celebrating and Sharing**. Much of the focus for Synod 2016 will be on the relationship of our faith community to the wider world and the way in which we partner with others in our mission of spreading the Good News. The Gospel is not only at work today in the visible church but is at work across our society. Eight groups from beyond our church have been invited to give presentation to the synod delegates on how their work and the work of our church come together. As I said last night, quoting my words from even before then: “It has fallen to our generation of the church to take wise and courageous counsel for the future. A big part of our work today is to decide what we keep with us on the journey forward and what we leave behind. An even bigger part of the work before us is to recognize that God is shaping us for a world different from the old one with new travelling companions.”

Our church is changing rapidly today and already is looking quite different from the church we once knew. There have been changes to liturgies and governance and ministry. These reflect wider changes in society affecting all institutions. Both Newfoundland and Labrador and the Anglican Church in Eastern Newfoundland and Labrador are home to people from around the world more than ever before and with the passing of the years we will look more and more like the world around us with people from everywhere part of our province and our church. Our ongoing work with refugee sponsorship is commendable. Diversity is something to celebrate.

At the Bishop’s Dinner on Saturday evening the **Diocesan Award of Merit** will be presented to five persons. We will also share in an Act of Remembrance led by our CLB as we mark 100 years since the tragic battle at **Beaumont Hamel** in 1916. A new video on the life and ministry of our diocese will also be screened for the first time and *Jacob’s Passage* of the Parish of St. Augustine will entertain and inspire! Synod will then end on Sunday morning at the Parish of the Good Shepherd with the celebration of the Holy Eucharist.

I am grateful for the efforts made in many parts of our diocese in our ministry to children and youth and young families. Important work has happened leading to renewal in many places. I have asked Canon Donna Ronan to organize a conference on this important ministry in the fall of 2016. It has been my intention to have at least two educational conferences for our diocese every year and I thank the other members of the Cathedral Chapter for their leadership in this regard. In line with the fall conference I continue to ponder the possibility of forming a community in our diocese of young persons, either in school or working, to live together for up to a year and perhaps beyond. I am inspired by the work of the Archbishop of Canterbury with his new Community of St. Anselm for young Christians at Lambeth. I welcome further conversations on this possibility and the possibility of remodeling some of our existing property for this purpose.

We welcome three new church buildings into our diocesan family. They are the Church of St. Michael and All Angels in St. John’s, the Church of St. Cyprian and St. Mary on Bell Island, and the Church of the Epiphany in Heart’s Delight. The Church of the Epiphany was established following the deconsecrations of the Church of the Good Shepherd in Cavendish, the Church of St. Matthew in Heart’s Delight-Islington, the Church of St. George the Martyr in Whiteway, and the Church of St. Matthew in Green’s Harbour. In the Parish of Labrador West the Church of St. Peter in Wabush was deconsecrated in 2015 and that congregation joined with the congregation of St. Paul’s Church in Labrador City. We welcome four new parishes into our Diocesan Family following restructuring in the Archdeaconry of Trinity-Conception-Placentia. Those parishes are Holy Spirit, Living Water, Holy Cross and Epiphany. Their establishment followed lengthy reviews of ministry in their regions intended to ensure that their ministry was responsive to local need. I am encouraged by ongoing discussions in our diocese about “greening our Worship Spaces” and reducing our carbon footprint.

At Synod in 2014 in my “State of the Union Address” I invited all parishes to engage in a correspondence with me on their ministry and their future. Only 5 parishes out of 35 at the time accepted my invitation. In 2015 I announced the Bishop’s Growing Church Initiative with a \$1000 grant to every parish toward the funding of new ministry initiatives. Only 7 parishes have applied. A study of churches in the UK from just a few years ago focused not upon those churches that were declining but upon churches that were growing. It became known as

the “7 Marks of a Healthy Church” and was published as *Growing Healthy Churches* (Robert Warren and Janet Hodgson). It has had a tremendous influence upon my thinking. The study found 7 key features of healthy churches:

- Healthy Churches are **Energized by faith**
- Healthy Churches have an **Outward-looking focus**
- Healthy Churches **Seek to find out what God wants**
- Healthy Churches **Face the cost of change and growth**
- Healthy Churches **Operate as a community**
- Healthy Churches **Make room for all**
- Healthy Churches **Do a few things and do them well**

We can choose to remain where things are familiar and where we feel safe and that might even seem to be a good thing, but it may not be *good enough* any longer. Our work today as the People of God is nothing short of choosing an alternate future for our church. We can passively allow things to unfold or we can actively engage in discernment and action to influence the outcome. Let us be a seeking church that seeks God’s Grace in all that we do.

I acknowledge that this year – 2016 – marks 40 years since the setting-up of three Dioceses in Newfoundland and Labrador in 1976. I do wonder if a review of the current tri-diocesan structure might be in order in light of massive demographic and societal changes since then with all three dioceses half the size they were in 1976 and with slightly over half our provincial population now living on the Avalon Peninsula. It is my intention to initiate the conversation this year with our newly elected Diocesan Executive Committee.

In terms of reviewing ministry, I thank Archdeacon Sandra Tilley for her leadership in developing a “Mutual Ministry Review” for all the clergy and parishes of our diocese. It is hoped that this process will begin across our diocese before the end of the year. Archdeacon Sandra has also taken a leading role as our Wellness Officer and also in Theological Education with the introduction of the *Pilgrim Study Program* in many parishes. And with reference to Theological Education we need to look at the needs of the diocese in the years ahead and how those needs will be met at Queen’s College in collaboration with other institutions. A major interest for us is the delivery of programs in some of the more remote parts of our diocese.

Much work has been done on our Constitution since our last meeting to bring the Constitution more fully into line with current practice and need. I thank our Chancellor, Brad Wicks QC, and the Legislative Committee for their leadership. The goal of these changes has been a more balanced composition of the Executive Committee and a realignment of all standing committees of the Diocese in light of the recognition that much of the work of the old Ministry Committee has been taken over by the Cathedral Chapter in the past two years. The option of electronic attendance at all committee meetings is also proposed for the future.

I announce two Diocesan appointments. The first will be to the role of Commissary to the Bishop. This is a Constitutional appointment and gives to the Commissary the authority to oversee the Diocese in the event of the Bishop’s resignation or death. Dean Josiah Noel has capably carried that responsibility for the past 13 years. It is my pleasure to appoint Archdeacon Charlene Taylor to the position of Episcopal Commissary effective May 1, 2016. The second appointment to announce today is that of the Honorary Diocesan Treasurer. This person works closely with the Diocesan Treasurer and Finance Committee in the management of all financial affairs for the Diocese. It is my pleasure to appoint Canon Elizabeth Barnes to the position of Honorary Diocesan Treasurer effective as of this date. Both appointments will continue for one year until the end of the term of the current Cathedral Chapter, April 17, 2017, following which time a new Chapter will be appointed.

At Synod in 2014 a decision was made to engage in a study of human sexuality and the *Easter(n) Reflections* series was created and launched. I thank Canon David Burrows and Archdeacon Charlene Taylor for their

leadership in this along with all who assisted and I commend the study for your use. The question of Marriage Equality continues to be a passionate one for the Anglican Church of Canada and will be voted upon at General Synod in Toronto in July. Although we might want to address it at this synod there is very little we can do until General Synod votes because General Synod currently has complete authority over the matter. Following that synod this diocese will respond appropriately. But right now we have to wait and see what the Anglican Church of Canada will do.

On the Sunday morning of this synod it was intended that a presentation would be made to allow a feasibility study to explore the desirability of a Diocesan Capital Campaign. The feasibility study would have been at no cost to the diocese but covered by the National Church. This would be the first such financial campaign in our diocese since the TEAM Campaign of the early 1990s and reflects a need to us to consider fresh financial investment in the life and ministry of our church. The areas proposed for new investment are outlined in a case-statement that represents a renewed vision of our church. They were: **Children-Youth-Young Families, Local Ministry Development, Connecting with the Wider Church and World**, and the **Lavrock Camp and Conference Centre**. The implicit question was: *Do we want to be shaped by the world we live in, or do we want to shape the world in which we live?* I acknowledge the great work that our Planned-Giving Officer, Mr. Kevin Smith, has done on this matter.

Although the reasons for this proposed Capital Campaign remain critical, I believe that this may not be the right time for us to proceed. It is true that we have genuine and pressing core needs in this diocese and they are all about extending ministry to our people and to the community at large. But today we find ourselves in a province struggling for survival economically and wallowing in debt with severe tax increases and cutbacks in government services and one of the grimmest provincial budgets in the history of Newfoundland and Labrador. According to many reports the poor and the elderly will be the hard hit in the days ahead. In light of the current economic climate and recent budget I believe it best to postpone any Capital Campaign for our church. I fully respect the ability of this Synod to make a decision in this regard.

The downturn in the price of oil among other provincial and international economic challenges has impacted us hard. Many people have lost jobs here and in other parts of Canada. But there is a place for our church in this. As I stated in my sermon last evening, “We cannot always look to government to fix our problems and now is a time for our church to be very close to the people and walk closely with all who are in pain and uncertainty and anxiety.” It is timely that we should convene a synod of this nature right now to discuss the role of our church in wider society. In one of my Pastoral Letters to the diocese – *Our Church and Community* – released in 2015 and available on our diocesan website I addressed the place of faith communities within society. Faith communities like churches enrich our common life immensely because of the way in which they bring people together within and beyond themselves. We cannot care only for our own but must also care for all who come our way. Let us be a place of hope and stability.

Churches, along with other voluntary associations and charities, play an important role in society and I believe strongly in the active participation of religious communities in the public square. Churches have developed a network of relationships within themselves and with others that enables them to contribute in lasting ways to the wider community. Indeed, volunteer organizations like churches shoulder many social responsibilities like food and clothing and furniture banks that governments are often unable to administer. Two growing edges I see for our churches today are in the areas of partnerships beyond ourselves (*ergo* this Synod) and in creative forms of Christian Hospitality (the theme of another Pastoral Letter of mine). I quote from my Pastoral Letter on Community:

I believe that some of the most important players in any social plan for Newfoundland and Labrador going forward are religious groups and communities. These groups not only add value to the discussion but also bring with them ready-made networks of volunteers and infrastructure that can enable governments to better reach communities and serve their people. One of the greatest values of religious

communities today lies in their ability to speak effectively on behalf of those who are often marginalized by society and whose influence over the levers of power is weak. It is incumbent upon those holding public office to preserve and enhance local communities, religious and otherwise, in order to preserve a vital human dimension to our common life here. The choice should not be between religion or no religion in the public sector but instead should center on how government partners with all of its citizens – both secular and religious – for the common good.

And so that the good work begun at this Diocesan Synod is deepened and enabled further, I call upon our diocese to take leadership in convening an ecumenical conference of other churches and faith communities in our province within one year to discuss the place of faith communities in the wider social fabric. I ask that the conference include key representatives of both our provincial and federal governments with invitations sent to both the Premier of Newfoundland and Labrador and the Prime Minister of Canada to come and speak to us. We, as the Anglicans of Eastern Newfoundland and Labrador, will come equipped to participate in a way that some churches are not yet equipped because of our work at this synod.

There have been many joys in being bishop of this diocese since 2014 but also a few disappointments. Among those have been the volume of personnel and property considerations that inundate Synod Office. With only three full-time staff members I have fewer on staff than some Rectors in the diocese and the ability to respond in a timely and effective manner has been a challenge. We are one of the largest Dioceses in the Anglican Church of Canada with about 30,000 identifiable members, 81 active churches, and 37 parishes spread across a landmass bigger than many countries in the world. I thank Archdeacon Sam Rose, Archdeacon Sandra Tilley, Ms. Elizabeth Crisby and Mr. Fred Dinham for their service at Synod Office and also Gail Brittain for her work in our Resource Centre. After our new Diocesan Executive Committee is in place I will be asking for a review of all matters financial in our diocese including our Diocesan Synod Office.

In closing, I thank the delegates gathered for their commitment to our church in giving of their time and abilities over the next four days. Let us keep before us the **Marks of Mission of the Worldwide Anglican Communion** as we discern best how to serve God and God's children in the days ahead. Those **Marks** are:

- To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom
- To teach, baptize, and nurture new believers
- To respond to human need by loving service
- To seek to transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and to pursue peace and reconciliation
- To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth

The Marks of Mission should inspire us to reflect upon our discipleship in the world, drawing us beyond our local and familiar ministries into initiatives that are fresh, life-giving and transformative. The Marks of Mission are an invitation to all of us to become a missional church, not focused upon maintaining what we have but reaching out creatively and compassionately to the world around us. Our God is a God of mission embodied in the person of Jesus who tells us in John's Gospel, "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."

May we always remember, *It is not the church that has a mission; it is God's mission that has a church.*

With my every blessing,  
+*Geoffrey*

The Rt. Rev. Dr. Geoff Peddle, 22 April 2016