



Diocese of Eastern Newfoundland and Labrador

THE ANGLICAN CHURCH OF CANADA

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Bishop's Fourth Pastoral Letter, December 2014 *Our Church and Education*

Dear Friends,

This is my fourth such letter to the Diocese this year following our Diocesan Synod in May. All such letters arise in some way from that Synod and my conversations that followed with many of you. I have addressed our Church's Possessions, our Church's Hospitality, and our Church's Children. Today I want to discuss **Our Church and Education**.

It is not my intention in this letter to discuss the involvement of the Anglican Church in the school system over the years. Nor will I discuss the Christian education of our children because that topic was addressed in my last letter. In this letter I want to briefly reflect upon the adult Christian education of our lay members and the initial and ongoing education of our clergy.

In the fourth chapter of his letter to the Ephesians St. Paul writes of the importance of "equipping the saints for the work of ministry, to the building up of the body of Christ." I have long valued Paul's words here as he implies that "equipping the saints" is both a pastoral and educational process involving apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. In this passage from his Letter to the Ephesians the Apostle discusses the different kinds of individuals bearing spiritual gifts needed in the life of the Christian community. The process of preparing Christians for service, according to Paul, is one that is ongoing until we "all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God ... to the measure of the full stature of Christ..." In my inaugural sermon to the Diocese when I became bishop I reflected upon this part of his letter in my discussion of the Church as the Body of Christ:

But becoming the Body of Christ in all ways does not happen instantly. In a sense, in this life, we are always becoming and never fully become. That is where formation must happen and historically, the Church has understood this formation into "the measure of the full stature of Christ" (Ephesians 4.13) as a growing participation in Christ's wisdom and love through study, worship, prayer and service. Formation is about receiving the knowledge and wisdom to love God, neighbour and self properly through our discipleship and ministry.

The importance of education to our life of ministry, service and discipleship cannot be underestimated. We cannot assume that people come to the church today with even a basic knowledge of the faith or of the scriptures that instruct it. The process of secularization that has been underway in our society over the past 50 years or so has stripped away much of the Christian story from wider society (notably from

our schools) and it becomes necessary once more to teach and instruct both lifelong members of the church and also newcomers to the faith in fresh ways. That is one of the reasons I have been advocating so strongly for a richer ministry to children in our churches.

Although today many will regard adult Christian education classes as part of the basic furniture of our church it was not always that way. Bible Studies, adult education classes, Baptism and Marriage Preparation Classes and the like were not always as common as they are now. Their importance has grown in recent years as a response to the relatively “unchurched” nature of many people seeking the ministry of the church and also as recognition of the desire for further education among those members with a desire to learn more. Indeed, it has become an essential skill for many of our clergy today to be able to facilitate learning opportunities in our parishes ranging from Bible Studies in Lent or Advent to multi-year theological programs.

A challenge that we face in this diocese with our great geography and dispersed population is being able to provide quality programs to our people wherever they may be living. Fortunately there are an increasing number of ways this can be done and I am delighted to see the strides being made in the delivery of such programs. We also find ourselves today with a much better formally-educated population than we did at one time when the clergy were often the best educated individuals in the community. That is no longer the case and in many places nowadays it is the lay people who are taking the lead in teaching and running programs.

Queen’s College has served this church well for 173 years but its role has shifted immensely in recent years. It is no longer only a residential college designed for those seeking ordained ministry in the Anglican Church. Today, most of the students of the College are not seeking ordination (many are not even Anglican) but are laypersons studying part-time to enhance their knowledge and skills for Christian service in the world. An increasing number are not studying within the physical College but are able to access courses and programs right where they are through the blessing of distance and distributed learning. This presents challenges and opportunities and I am encouraged by the work that has been done to date to respond to a changing world. More work remains to be done. Indeed, I believe that the future of Queen’s College will depend not on full-time residential students but upon its ability to deliver programs outside of St. John’s in local communities across our province for clergy and laity leading all the way to ordination for some.

As Anglicans, we are a people who recognize a particular tradition of theology and worship and it remains important to us that that tradition is maintained and recognized in our church life. For that reason our leaders must be learned in the Anglican Way before ordination so that they can pass on the faith as this church has received it. As broad as the Anglican tradition received by this diocese might be, it does not include every manifestation of Christianity in the world today. Our leaders need to understand that well if they are to teach it well.

There is an increasing awareness among our clergy of the value of continuing education. Most clergy today do not stop their education with graduation from theological college but maintain and build on their skills over the years. Many today are engaged in academic programs in their parishes, availing of distance learning and traveling to seminars and lectures when needed. They are finding that the reward of continuing education in this way keeps them fresh and excited for parish and diocesan ministry. Other clergy arrange sabbaticals so that they can immerse themselves in a focused time of study to study locally or in other parts of the world. Those in church leadership today should be “reflective practitioners” who are constantly reflecting upon their practice of ministry as they learn and grow. The ongoing education of its professional staff is standard in other professions today and it should be no

different for our church. As I write I am encouraged that more than a dozen of our clergy are in discussions with me about various continuing education programs and sabbaticals.

I believe we must be a church that affirms education throughout life for all of our people, clergy and lay. We must also be prepared to invest in learning both in terms of the time commitment we take for education and also in the financial resources we make available. One diocese I know refers to itself as a “learning church” and I can think of no better term to apply to a faith community that is serious about lifelong education for all its members.

By now, those of you who have been reading my pastoral letters will have recognized that I see these letters as both opportunities to teach and also opportunities to advocate for change where needed. My purpose in this letter is simply to affirm the value of Christian education and *continuing* Christian education throughout life for all of our people. What I advocate is that we provide both the encouragement and resources to make this possible for all who desire to learn. Members of our parishes should know that quality educational programs can be available for them through their local parish community. Laypersons should be confident that their clergy come equipped to teach the faith as needed. Clergy should know that they are encouraged and upheld in their desire to learn and enhance the skills they have acquired by the time of ordination. And we do this so that all the saints of our church may be equipped for the work of ministry, for building up the Body of Christ in our world.

My next such pastoral letter will be sent to you in January and will be called, “***Our Church and its Community.***”

With my every blessing upon your journey,

+*Geoff* (PhD)