



Bishop's Charge

to

**32nd Session of the Diocesan Synod of
Eastern Newfoundland and Labrador
Part B**

November 4, 2022

*"See, I am doing a new thing...Do you not perceive it?"
(Isaiah 43:19)*



ANGLICAN EAST NL

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The Thirty-Second Session (Part B) of the Diocesan Synod of Eastern Newfoundland & Labrador November 4-5, 2022

Scriptural Theme:

"See, I am doing a new thing...Do you not perceive it?" (Isaiah 43:19)

My dear Diocesan Family

Let us begin with prayer:

Holy God, this is your world, and we are your people. Through our narrow vision, we can only see what we currently experience. Without you, our plans are often futile, our efforts limited, and we grow discouraged. Yet, you are always doing new things in your world and your church. Through Jesus, you remind us of your constant love for us. When we struggle to understand our present circumstances, open our eyes and hearts to perceive your work in the world and our lives. May we move forward in confidence and hope with you and each other. Amen.

Welcome to all watching and worshipping online and to our Synod Delegates as we gather together as the Diocesan Synod of Eastern Newfoundland & Labrador for the conclusion of our 32nd Session, which began in February of this year.

The Scriptural Theme for our Diocesan Synod is "*See, I am doing a new thing...Do you not perceive it?*" from Isaiah 43:19. This passage refers to Isaiah proclaiming a message of new life and hope for God's people.

In Isaiah, we hear God say, "*Forget the former things, do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland.*"

When we look at our lives and the lives of our churches, what do you see? Do you see possibilities or problems? Do you long for the past? Or do you look for the future?

Perhaps, the first step to embracing the new thing that God wants to do in our lives is to change our focus: If we continually look behind, we cannot see where we are going.

This "*new thing*" that God is doing is fulfilled in the coming of Jesus and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The challenge for the people of Isaiah's day, and indeed our own, is "*do you not perceive it?*"

God is doing New Things

Indeed, God is doing a new thing at this very moment as I stand here in the Church of St. Andrew in the Parish of Lake Melville in the Archdeaconry of Labrador. Through the gift of technology, we thank God that the Diocesan Bishop is delivering the Charge and will Chair our Diocesan Synod from Labrador for the very first time in our history! What has long been impossible is now made possible through adapting and utilizing the technology of the age. As someone who began my ministry here in the Big Land over 24 years ago in the Parish of Battle Harbour (now Southeast Labrador), standing here today as your Bishop is an incredible experience. Praise God for this new thing that God has done!

But there are so many other new things that God is doing in our Diocese and beyond. In preparation for Synod, I requested every parish to tell me something "new" that God has been doing in your churches and congregations in the last year or so. Since the onset of the COVID pandemic, we have had to adapt and change quickly. I wanted to hear about a "new thing" you have seen that reflects God at work in your local setting. When we are able to see from God's perspective, it allows us to see the new things God is doing daily and hope in what is to come. Your responses received as of October 31, 2022, are attached to this Charge in **Appendix A**. I encourage you to read, learn, and be inspired by what "New Things" God is doing in our Diocese.

If there is a theme to all these parish responses, it is to have hope amid uncertainty - or, as we would commonly say, to have faith in God. We know this is God's Church, and we are God's People. The challenge is, do we believe and trust in that? Do we believe that God is with us and for us and guiding us as we move forward?

To quote from our Cathedral's response to the new things happening there, "*We have a unique opportunity to reshape the way our church community looks, on many levels. We have the choice: do we just continue with what we inherited, doing things the way they were always done, or do we reshape our church to suit the needs of the community today, and into the future? We pray for God's continued guidance as we explore that choice in the months and years ahead.*"

A Way Forward

Since our February gathering at this Synod, much conversation and work have been ongoing around *A Way Forward*, which focuses mainly on our Diocese's operational and

structural challenges. We have been looking long and hard at ourselves to see how as a Diocese, we can move forward to ensure that ministry and mission can continue and grow in new ways. Our newly appointed Mission Archdeacons and Mission Canons faithfully lead these ongoing discussions. You will hear from them tomorrow in their report to Synod.

With financial reality, many parishes have had to cut stipend levels to support the ordained ministry. This requires partnerships between parishes to support a clergyperson in employment. We have encouraged conversations, and in this past year alone, we have seen new partnerships emerge between the Parishes of Port de Grave and Shearstown/Butlerville; between Portugal Cove, Bell Island, and Pouch Cove; between Paradise and Torbay; and most recently between Heart's Content and Heart's Delight/Islington. Sharing clergy to provide ordained ministry and leadership has been the first step. I pray that there will be others.

There are also continuing conversations between those still discerning what would be the best steps forward together. I am aware of discussions between the two parishes in Mount Pearl and between Spaniard's Bay and Carbonear. One parish - St. Michael & All Angels - decided to sell their building. They are actively looking for partners to house their faith community and share in new ministry and mission opportunities. I pray that God will open hearts and church homes to accommodate this parish and others as we seek to build God's Church in this Diocese.

It is clear that discussing and planning how to restructure and reshape our Diocese will be an ongoing process. At this Synod in February, we agreed to follow the *Way Forward* plan in immediate restructuring within our parishes. This clearly indicated that we want this Diocese to get moving again. We want things to return to some sense of stability and purpose. We want a vision for the future. We want to rebuild our churches and Diocese.

But, if we want to rebuild this Diocese or any of our congregations and parishes, it has to be more than a bricks-and-mortar initiative because, if that is all it is, it will become harder and harder to do so. In my Charge in February, I requested that every Vestry submit an entire cost inventory of the properties in their congregations to the Executive Officer, Archdeacon Charlene Taylor. As Bishop, I wanted to know how much money we spend on maintaining our buildings and lands in the Diocese for 2021. Last year, the total cost to keep every building and property open in the Diocese of Eastern Newfoundland and Labrador was \$1,625,606. In the City of St. John's alone, the total cost to keep up the properties in our six St. John's parishes, including my office at Church House, was \$576,706. I am grateful to Mr. Gerry Beresford, our Diocesan

Property Consultant, for compiling this information which you will find attached to this Charge as **Appendix B**.

In an age of declining church attendance and membership, a Provincial death rate that exceeds births, historic levels of inflation, increasing unemployment, fixed pensions, and most recently, according to Statistics Canada, a significant increase of 12.6 million Canadians who no longer belong to any organized religion, if we are going to try to maintain our current properties and structure as they are, it will become more and more of a struggle. So, we have to ask, is that what God wants us to do? Is God's Church more than bricks and mortar?

The "Why" Forward

That brings me to the Gospel for this evening. It's a familiar one, and we have heard it before. It's after that first Easter, and as time moves on, the disciples have a choice to make: continue in this new life offered by their beloved Lord and Teacher or go back to their former lives, back to the way things used to be. Well, we know what they decided, or precisely what Peter decided. "*I'm going back to fishing,*" he declared.

But as we know, Peter would soon meet Jesus, and his life would completely change. That's because Jesus offered Peter a new way to see where God led him into the future. And I love this Gospel because Jesus tells Peter to take something he was so used to doing - fishing - and try it in a new way - by casting the net on the other side of the boat.

Of course, the miraculous catch of fish was not the real miracle. The miracle was the faithful obedience of Peter and the disciples to listen and do what Jesus said. Even though they did not even know it was Jesus, they trusted in his words, and God blessed their faith.

The new thing for Peter and the disciples was the realization that their lives - and the lives of billions since that day - would be transformed forever when they encountered and experienced the love of God through Jesus Christ.

We have been talking about *A Way Forward* in our Diocese for months, and we will be for months to come. And if there is one thing Anglicans are good at is finding a way to move things forward, even if sometimes, it can cause us so much anxiety and frustration, and sadly even hurt. But maybe it is time to shift our focus - to cast our net to the other side - and realign our *Way Forward* with the "why" forward. The "why" represents our core beliefs and values as Christians, our baptismal covenant, and our purpose and identity as God's people. The "why" in everything we are and do is Jesus

Christ. The way forward is the way we live out and show God's love for the world - to love others as God loves us.

I know it sounds simplistic, but isn't that the beautiful message of the Gospel? Love God, Love Neighbour, Love Yourself. But that is where everything must start for us to move forward.

Survive or Thrive?

For a long time, we have used the word growth when measuring our churches. We say we want to grow our churches. While it has a deeper meaning, we tend to use the word growth in a quantitative sense - seeing an increase in those attending worship or joining our churches. Or a growth in finances as an indicator of success. We know that in some cases, this happens, and it is lovely. But in some other cases, numerical growth like this will not occur. I am thankful to Bishop Shane Parker of the Diocese of Ottawa, who offered me a better word and understanding that helped me tremendously.

Bishop Shane said he no longer used the word growth when it comes to churches because it can create an unhealthy attitude about yourself if you do not see an increase in your congregation's numbers. He prefers to use the word, thrive. He said that while not every church can grow, every church can thrive - it is more of a qualitative than a quantitative measuring stick.

Some of you may remember the excellent book written by Canon Harold Percy called Your Church Can Thrive. Canon Percy was in our Diocese in 2015, leading a conference on Mission and Congregational Development. He says that no matter what your congregation's size if you put effort into teaching people how to pray, how to share their faith, and how to offer genuine hospitality - in other words, how to teach discipleship - every church has the potential to thrive. Every single parish in our Diocese has the potential to thrive in discipleship and mission.

In 2018, Synod received and accepted a Diocesan Commission report conveniently titled, *Surviving or Thriving: The Future of the Church in the Diocese of Eastern Newfoundland and Labrador*. As I said in the first part of my Charge this past February, as your Bishop, it is my full intention to keep *Surviving or Thriving* and the excellent work of Synod 2018 before us.

The recommendations of the Commission, which passed at Synod 2018, provided a solid framework for becoming a church that can thrive and not just survive. However, we cannot ignore what we have all gone through these past two years during the pandemic. We are at a crossroads in our future. Will we choose the path that leads to trying to

survive - just struggling to keep the structure going? Or will we choose the journey of our baptismal covenant - becoming a church that thrives when we place God at the centre of everything?

Since we last met in February and began working on the *Way Forward* plan, our Diocese has engaged with the Anglican Church of Canada, our National Church, which has been working on an emerging strategic project called *A Changing Church. A Searching World. A Faithful God: Five transformational aspirations for our Church*. These five transformational aspirations emerged from a deep listening process conducted across Canada during the pandemic. I asked our Diocesan Executive to be part of this process. After a meeting this past June with the Strategic Planning Working Group of the National Church, we endorsed being one of the pilot dioceses that will refer to these five aspirations as a touchstone in developing our Diocesan strategic plan. You will find an overview of the five transformational aspirations attached to this Charge as **Appendix C**.

A Way Forward is an integral part of an overall strategy in our Diocese during this transitional period we find ourselves. While *A Way Forward* is focused on the ongoing operational and structural challenges within the Diocese, it is clear that further strategic planning is needed - the "why" forward I spoke about earlier. Such an exercise will allow Anglicans to be part of what comes next in a mission-focused way.

I have sought help with this strategic planning, and I am pleased to announce that we have engaged the services of Ms. Angela Morgan, a Senior Consultant with Triware Technologies, to help us. Angela is one of us - a lifelong Anglican and current member of our Cathedral and Diocesan Executive Committee. She has extensive experience in performance measurement and all aspects of the strategic planning process. Her professional assistance will help facilitate a strategic planning process within our Diocese that results in a framework to establish, measure, act upon, and report back on strategic goals. This will help us develop Diocesan goals and action plans to achieve our mission and purpose as Jesus' disciples here in Eastern Newfoundland & Labrador.

Angela's work has already begun with an initial session with the Strategic Planning Working Group, our Mission Archdeacons and Canons, the Executive Archdeacon, and myself. Other key stakeholders will be brought into the conversation. Over the next while, a series of Diocesan-wide consultations with our parishes will introduce the strategic planning process and help inform individual goals for each parish that will build into an overall Diocesan strategic plan.

This process is long overdue and urgently needed. But we will take the time necessary to get this right. We will need your input as we move forward. But more importantly, we need your prayers and support as this strategic planning process unfolds.

So, what does all of this mean? Well, I want to share my thoughts about our Diocese that have been on my heart for some time.

Deepening Relationships

If you ask me what my hope is for our future, it is simply that every person who is part of God's family here in Eastern Newfoundland & Labrador will deepen our relationship with God in Christ. We will rebuild nothing in this Diocese if we do not start with God. If we are to do anything in this Diocese, we must be renewed in our relationship with God and one another. This is foundational baptismal ministry.

Our relationships need to be deepened with our Indigenous relatives in Christ as we journey in reconciliation with the emerging Sacred Circle Indigenous Church. As you will read in the Report from St. Timothy's in Rigolet, I made my first visit as Bishop to share with the community in the ordination of the Rev'd Sarah Baikie as a Priest. I went into Rigolet feeling very anxious and nervous about being a white settler from a colonial church visiting the First People of the land. But because of Sarah and her beautiful spirit, the people of Rigolet truly welcomed me and gave me the gift of friendship, love, and acceptance. That will always be a holy moment in my ministry that I will cherish forever.

We are a Church that is called to respect and champion the dignity of every human being. We are a church called to work for the dismantling of sexism, racism, and colonialism. We are a Church called to nurture right relationships among people of faith in local, national, and global communities and networks.

I believe the foundation lies in deepening relationships. How is our relationship with God? How are our relationships with God's people? Nothing will be rebuilt or fixed outside of us unless we go deep within ourselves with God. I'm speaking of a spiritual renovation and revival in this Diocese. That will mean looking at our own personal relationship with God and God's People in God's World. How are we, as God's people in this Diocese, being reshaped and renewed for God's mission?

A core value is deepening our relationship with God and one another, and this needs to be at the very centre of the life and ministry of this Diocese.

Transforming Discipleship

Flowing from our relationship with God means looking at our relationship with God's people and God's world. That will mean looking at our Christian discipleship.

At Lambeth, we spent a whole day just talking about discipleship, and every bishop endorsed a Global Communion Call for "all Anglicans, in every aspect of their lives, to learn and to learn again to love and serve in the Way of Christ with the strength that God supplies."

I hope every parish will offer intentional education and preparation for transforming discipleship, both those already involved and those God calls in the future. I am pleased that about ten of our parishes, including this Parish of Lake Melville, have agreed to offer the Revive ministry for their lay leadership. What is Revive? Revive is a discipleship program to help active lay leaders—wardens, treasurers, committee chairs, vestry members, Sunday School and Confirmation teachers, youth ministers, pastoral visitors, and liturgical ministers—grow in confidence as spiritual leaders. Revive is about transformation through spiritual formation. This small-group program transforms leaders of practical church ministry into confident spiritual leaders who love God and participate in Christ's ministry. My offer is that the Diocese will pay for the materials for every parish that wants to offer Revive for the first time. For those parishes who wish to take me up on my offer, just let me know.

It also brings me joy that some of our parishes have adopted the Way of Love from Archbishop Michael Curry. I mentioned this discipleship program in February and am encouraged to know others have made the Way of Love the focus of their lives and ministry. I met Bishop Curry at Lambeth this summer and thanked him for sharing the Way of Love with the whole Church. In his usual exuberant way, he said, "*It's all about love, my brother, it's all about love!*"

Our Diocese will thrive when every baptized member fully embraces their discipleship and lives a Jesus-shaped life. The ministry of the church cannot just be that of the ordained. In fact, we simply do not have enough clergy to do ordained ministry anymore. So that means everyone is called to be a disciple and discern what ministry God is calling them to serve. Together, both lay and ordained, and through the power of the Holy Spirit, we will be transformed into disciples living our baptismal ministry day after day.

Renewing Stewardship

Transforming discipleship will mean renewing stewardship. That means supporting God's Church and God's World with our gifts of time, talent, and treasure. It is always

amazing to me that even with limited financial resources, our parishes and Diocese are always one of the largest supporters of the Primate's World Relief and Development Fund - the outreach arm of the Anglican Church. And how many of us have been to a Church Potluck where the food has run out? We are generous people!

But we are also a Church that is called to live our baptismal commitment to be stewards of God's creation, that protects, sustains and renews the life of the earth. At Lambeth, one of the most critical Calls affirmed by all the bishops was to take immediate and urgent action to save our climate, which is in crisis. This is not something we should do but must do if we want to be faithful to our baptismal promises and to try to save this fragile Earth, our island home, from destruction.

At Lambeth, the Communion Forest was launched. In many parts of this planet, the deforestation and destruction of our forests are furthering the climate emergency we face. Called a "*global act of hope*," the Communion Forest looks at restoring our ecological balance through reforestation, forest protection, and restoring wetlands and coastal habitats. Some dioceses in Africa, for example, make tree planting in their local churches a part of every baptism and confirmation as a sign of our covenant with God's creation.

If we are to take renewing stewardship seriously, then we have to begin at home. What are the ways that our church buildings further destroy God's creation by polluting the atmosphere? What practices do we need to implement to reduce the environmental footprint of our church buildings, our homes, and ourselves?

We are blessed to live in a beautiful part of God's creation here in Labrador and Newfoundland. Jesus says, "*where your treasure is, there your heart will be also*." Let us do more to protect this valuable treasure that is this Province and our entire planet.

Engaging Partnerships

This Diocese is a family. We are not independent congregations, but one family united in love and fellowship in the Gospel. It always pains me when I hear words and language from our congregations that suggest that "*the Diocese*" is "*that crowd in St. John's*." You are the Diocese. We are not competitors but companions. When working together in partnership, our parishes become sources of new life and energy. We are seeing that now with the new partnerships formed in the past few months.

When one parish is struggling, we all suffer together. When one parish rejoices, we should all celebrate and glorify God. When I hear that one parish (or even congregations within a parish) refuse to talk to a neighbouring parish, it deeply hurts the

whole Diocese. Let's stop doing this to each other. Let us engage with each other in renewed partnerships and work together to build up the Body of Christ.

Our partnerships also need to include the wider neighbourhoods we live. Many of our churches have built partnerships with community groups over the years, especially in sharing our buildings, such as daycares and after-school programs. But other partnerships exist that help build community life and help bring dignity to every human being, such as providing community meals, food banks, winter clothes for refugees, and so much more.

We should also consider partnering with other Christian denominations and faith traditions. As Lambeth, the bishops agreed, we should strive to forge new friendships with other religious traditions, modelling our commitment to peace-making and the common good. By working together, we can seek to transform unjust structures of society, challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation.

It is a shame when we limit our church buildings to just a few hours a week. To be honest, if we do not start using our church buildings to benefit the communities we live in, I'm afraid we will lose them. Engaging in partnerships can also create entrepreneurial opportunities, providing alternate revenue streams to support ministry in our parishes.

I was at St. Lawrence Church in Portugal Cove, which recently opened a new Thrift Store, which saw hundreds of people donate items that would have ended up in the landfill. These are repurposed for sale at affordable costs that benefit those, especially those on low or fixed income, with clothing and other necessary items. It's all they talk about in the Cove, and it is the Church, in partnership with the community, that makes it possible.

One emerging partnership that brings me great hope and encouragement is currently being explored between our Diocese and the Anglican Diocese of Guatemala. This arose out of Lambeth when I met their Bishop Silvestre Romero. But actually, I worked for his father 22 years ago, who was also named Silvestre Romero when he was the Bishop of Belize in Central America. A simple conversation in Canterbury has led to an online Bible study with members of our clergy in both dioceses. Please pray for this new partnership with Guatemala.

Relationships, Discipleship, Stewardship and Partnerships. These are the "ships" that I believe God calls us to get on board, set sail, and chart a new course in our history. But as we all know, this isn't a new course at all, but a very holy and ancient journey we are on. Perhaps, this is us simply trusting in God enough to cast the net on

the other side of the boat; or to see God doing a new thing among us and having the faith and vision to perceive it.

This is my vision, and I hope it will be our vision for the Diocese of Eastern Newfoundland & Labrador.

The Rt. Rev'd Samuel V. Rose
Bishop
Eastern Newfoundland & Labrador