

Deepening Relationships

By Bishop Sam Rose

What do you think is the hardest part about following Jesus? Do you think the most challenging part is letting others know you are a Christian?

Sure, we can wear a cross or talk about the church. We can say our prayers and read the Bible. But do other people know that you are a Christian? Do you know you are a Christian?

You might say, but we are Anglicans; we are not Christians! That is only half true; you are indeed a Christian! Just knowing that is a great place to start!

As part of our strategic plan called "Set Sail: Charting the Course for Christ's Church," I have asked the people of the Diocese of Eastern Newfoundland & Labrador to look closer at their relationship with God and each other. One of the ways we can do that is by deepening these relationships. We can do nothing in this Diocese if we do not start with God. If we are to do anything, we must renew our relationship with God and one another.

I believe the foundation lies in deepening relationships. 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 relationship with God and God's People in God's World.

How is your relationship with God? In other words, "Do you love Jesus?" It is a personal question, but one that is so important. We go to the doctor occasionally for a physical or a check-up. Our spiritual health is no different.

We can do this spiritual check-up by looking at what we are called to be and to do as baptized Christians. That will mean inviting every baptized person to renew their faith by regularly examining the Baptismal Covenant.

Do you believe in God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?

We start by saying, "I believe." That is faith.

Faith says, "I believe in God." God is the universe's creator, ruler, and source of all love and authority.

Faith says, "I believe in Jesus." Jesus - God in human form, sent as the Saviour of humanity and the one through whom we can have a personal relationship with God.

Faith says, "I believe in the Holy Spirit." The Holy Spirit - the active presence of God in the world. The Spirit is "God in action" responsible for inspiring and guiding believers with spiritual gifts needed to fulfill our purpose in life.

And by saying, "I believe in God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit," the logical question should be, what is expected of me as a believer? How do I live day by day as a Christian?

To answer this, we must begin at the beginning, which is our baptism. In baptism, we promise to accept the responsibilities of living a Christian life, and the Baptismal Covenant is a way to see how we are doing.

Will you continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers?

What does this mean for us?

It means we commit to continue growing in our faith and being active participants in the Christian community through learning and following the teachings of Jesus Christ as passed down through the Apostles. It means reading and studying the Bible and committing to participating in the church's life in worship, fellowship, and action. We build relationships with other believers through worshiping together, chiefly in receiving the Holy Eucharist, where all are welcome. We are also expected to have a regular prayer life, an essential part of Christian practice in deepening our relationship with God.

Will you persevere in resisting evil and, whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord?

What does this mean for us?

It means we promise to turn away from choosing things which cause harm to others and ourselves. The old cartoon with the devil on one shoulder and the angel on the other is a great way to understand it. We are tempted daily to choose a path which can either help or hurt. And because no one is perfect and we all make bad choices, when we mess up and cause harm and hurt, we promise to recognize our mistakes, confess these sins to God, seek forgiveness and strive to be better. In essence, we realize our mistakes, say we are sorry and commit to making better decisions that reflect God's love in the future.

Will you proclaim by word and example the good news of God in Christ?

What does this mean?

Our commitment is to share the message of the Good News with others that God loves them. God's love was shown in the words and actions of Jesus Christ, God's only Son. God sent Jesus to save us from our mistakes (sins) by giving his life for everyone by dying on the Cross and rising from the dead. When we believe, we have faith that God the Son (Jesus) has saved humanity and has restored our relationship with God the Father, and even after we die, we will live with God forever. This is the purest form of Love that exists. Not only do we tell others about this Love, but we are also to show this Love through how we treat others. We are called to be examples to others by showing kindness, forgiveness, and love as a way to share our faith in God.

Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbour as yourself?

What does this mean?

This promise means that we recognize the presence of Jesus in everyone we encounter and treat them with the love and respect that Jesus himself would. When we love "our neighbour," which is everyone we meet, we do so with compassion, to put the needs and well-being of others before our own, and to actively work for the betterment of all people. If God loves everyone, so should God's people. We must be reminded that as followers of Jesus, we are called to love and serve others in the way that Jesus did and taught us.

Will you strive for justice and peace among all people and respect the dignity of every human being?

What does this mean?

We are all too aware of the problems in the world: violence, poverty, hunger, injustice, and so many more. As Christians, we commit to actively creating a more just and peaceful society and treating all people with dignity and respect. We work with God to be part of a community where everyone is treated fairly and conflicts are resolved peacefully. It involves standing up for the rights of the marginalized, promoting equality, and working to end discrimination and oppression. All are made in the image of God, and we promise to respect each individual's inherent worth and value, regardless of their background, beliefs, or circumstances. We reject the evils of prejudice and mistreatment of others and challenge systems and structures that corrupt and destroy God's people.

Will you strive to safeguard the integrity of God's creation and respect, sustain, and renew the life of the Earth?

What does this mean?

We are all too aware that our climate is in crisis. We commit to actively protecting and preserving the natural environment and treating it with respect, care, and good stewardship. This world is a gift from God. We must protect it from pollution and harm and take steps to mitigate the impacts of climate change. Our Earth is interconnected, and human actions significantly affect it. Respecting, sustaining and renewing God's creation means sustainably using its resources, restoring and conserving natural habitats, and taking measures to ensure the continuation of life on Earth. This promise is a reminder that as followers of Jesus Christ, we are called to be good stewards of God's creation and to actively work towards protecting and preserving the natural environment for future generations.

If we want to know God more deeply, it means taking what we promise more seriously. To grow in our faith as Anglican Christians is a lifelong journey. We have made growing faith important to our young people as a Church. We have Sunday School and Confirmation Classes, but continuing Adult Faith education is essential. I have asked every parish in this Diocese to commit to ongoing Christian education for all those of every age who wish to take seriously the Baptismal Covenant and the promises they make at their baptism.

And if we are to take this seriously, it will mean more than renewing our faith. God calls us as individuals, but we are part of a broader and diverse family of believers called the Church. And in this Christian Church - made up of all who have placed their faith and hope in Jesus - we strive to welcome all people, as God has welcomed us.

I call all our congregations to be renewed in faith and relationship with God and others. Churches should stand out and be leaders in the local community, especially in showing care and compassion for those in need. A missional church connects personal faith with social action. When we collectively commit to the Baptismal Covenant as a Church family, we embrace the call to be disciples seeking and serving Jesus in all places, at all times, and for all people.

We work to become inclusive, supportive, and non-judgemental communities of faith as we continue to seek and serve Christ in all persons: those already identifying as part of our faith communities, those looking for connections with our faith communities, those against whom wrongs have been done in the name of our faith communities; and the broader community outside of our faith entirely.

There are so many in the world that are looking for hope. With God, we can be that hope. I believe the foundation lies in deepening relationships - with God and one another. This needs to be at the very centre of the life and ministry of this Diocese of Eastern Newfoundland & Labrador.