

Made New in Christ – So What Do We Do Now?

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65th Synod of the Diocese of Edmonton

Thank you all for a wonderful synod, great conversations and teachings. The best way to go from here today is to commit to one another that the things we have learnt will not have a passive life; notes in margins or on documents on our ipads or laptops. We live in a new creation and therefore must continue to renew ourselves – and not by just wandering about thinking of trendy things to do and disrupting everything that we have ever done before. Rather it is to say where are we called to grow. Are there things we have done for a while now that no longer seem to be working?

So here is the first take away:

Please be open to the newness of God.

Think of anything that you have done in a certain way for a number of years, think perhaps of your favourite form of church service. Now how would you feel if someone said that it could, or even should, be done differently? You might feel unsettled, grumpy, belligerent or even angry. Yet Jesus has shown that the kingdom of heaven has broken in, that with the reconciliation of the world with God through Jesus' own life and death earth has to look more like heaven. We have to reflect more and more the true image of God.

As the baptized children of God we should expect to see this transformation on a daily basis. Rowan Williams (in *Being Christian*) said, “So what else do you expect to see in the baptized? An openness to human need, but also a corresponding openness to the Holy Spirit. In the life of baptized people there is a constant rediscovering, reenacting of the Father's embrace of Jesus in the Holy Spirit. We stand not only in the midst of human suffering and muddle but in the middle of the love and delight of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In the middle of the heart of God.”

I believe this with all my heart which gives me hope for and faith in the life and future of the church, Christ's own body. So we, too, are a new creation in a new age called to new things. When we actively seek reconciliation and healing, when we actively seek community then we become who we are called to be – and for us we become more Christ-like.

So please be open to what God is calling you to do.

The next points relate to the diagram that you had in the bishop's report in the circular. Here it is again. I'm going to use the headings for the other take-aways. These are factors seen in churches that are vibrant and alive, not stagnant and dying. I invite you take this diagram into small groups and vestries to see how things are going. Don't worry if you can't tick all the boxes, don't worry if some of the things you've tried in various areas have not worked. That's not the point.

If you want some help or just to brainstorm, remember that there are a pack of us to help – Archdeacons, the Dean, and Canons with special portfolios, and, of course, there is me, your Bishop. I love nothing more than working with my brothers and sisters in Christ to build up Christ's body and, quite frankly, to plan to change the world.

Factors Associated with growth

Results from the survey of parishes highlight that, across all types of churches, there is **"no single recipe"** for growth (or simple solutions to decline).

But there are some key "ingredients". Where there is growth we are likely to see:



Have a clear mission and purpose.

We found throughout the parishes of the diocese that when people are invited into dreaming the dreams of God for their communities and involved in planning the work of the church in discipleship and in community, that there is greater excitement and new possibilities open up. As you know, I am very keen on Mission Action Plans (MAPS) which are simply a way of deciding after prayer and conversation what it is that God is calling us to do. We saw with the REACH campaign projects that people in our parishes have amazing dreams for the future of the church and that many of them involved taking bold steps in faith to support new ministries and initiatives. Now I am asking you to take the next step and get to know more about the ID program and Jesus' discipling model based on Luke 7, 8, 9, and 10, which we have shared with you. I hope that once we give feedback from our pilot group that more parishes will get involved and we can encourage personal discipleship and faith sharing at levels we have never experienced before. We want to be disciples who make disciples.

We will all be intentional about growth

Acts 2:46-47 says "Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved."

We will show our willingness to change and adapt

We are definitely not a one-size-fits-all diocese, having churches with many different styles and approaches around the diocese. Not everything we do is successful; some of our new initiatives have been for a time or a season, rather than forever, but each time we learn something. We need to keep on getting better at listening – to what goes right, to what goes wrong, and to what people are saying.

Our churches will be places where lay people as well as ordained clergy are active in leadership and other roles

As I said last night, we have seen a renewed interest in lay training programs across the diocese. I also hope to encourage Mental Health First Aid training and healing of memories

training for lay leaders who would like to take a leadership role in the healing ministry of the church, both in our own buildings, but also out in the community. The role of mentors in the ID program is one which I am very excited about. Leadership of anything, but especially of the church, is a collaborative task. We flourish in community more than we do alone.

Our Churches will actively engage children and young people

I have been seeing a great resurgence in ministry to children through vacation Bible schools, messy churches and camps. Sunday school is still something that not every parish has on a regular basis but it is encouraging to see places where we are going out to parents and helping them to nurture their children in faith. I am also encouraged by seeing the welcome for children within worship services. I won't mention the parish but I was very impressed recently at the small children's area at the front of the church where children were present throughout worship – obviously comfortable and knowing that this was their church. It set a tone of welcome and of inclusion.

Youth Alpha and our camping programs have added to ways in which our youth can go outside their usual social groupings in order to talk and learn about faith and fellowship.

We will work on developing a welcoming culture in every church which builds on-going relationships with people

As baptized Christians we “stand not only in the midst of human suffering and muddle but in the middle of the love and delight of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In the middle of the heart of God” (Rowan Williams). Therefore, we have to show the welcome of God to all who come into community with us. We have to go out and represent the God who never stops looking for his children and welcoming them in. Do you remember in our gospel reading last night - Nathaniel might have been wondering to himself, How can Jesus know me? How can Jesus love me? How can Jesus want me? Perhaps those are questions in our communities being asked by people in all sectors of society.

We will be Churches that nurture disciples

I am asking all of us to pay even closer attention to our own formation and discipleship. We are offering foundational courses across the diocese to get started. The *Pilgrim* series

provides materials and our new I.D. program will have many opportunities for shared growth and empowerment. I encourage all of us to take advantage of these opportunities so that we may be more faithful to our own task of inviting people to know God. I am asking that when the materials for A Jesus Shaped Life are released that we will engage with them with enthusiasm and purpose in churches large and small, urban and rural.

This is where we are with it so far:

A Jesus Shaped Life

To be a disciple of Jesus Christ means to be someone whose life is shaped by Christ and who therefore, in the power of the Holy Spirit, is called to reflect in their life the will of God in the world.

The Five Marks of Mission describe what this life looks like for Christian communities – these are the ministries and priorities which should be shaping every Anglican and every church.

The Five Marks of Mission are:

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

But they can also be the marks of an individual Christian life that is shaped by Christ and reflecting the will of God – a Jesus Shaped Life.

What will this mean?

1. Every Christian needs to know or rediscover that they are called to be a witness to Christ in their daily life. This will include telling the story of what their faith means but also by the lives they lead.

2. Every Christian needs to be able to give a reason for the hope that is in them. They need to know about their faith, understand its meaning and relevance, and live by its standards, and help nurture others to discover or rediscover their faith in Christ.

3. Every Christian needs to be a good neighbour in their community and active in helping those who are in need and disadvantaged by acts of mercy, loving service and by charitable giving.

4. Every Christian needs to be committed to building a better world now and for the future by active involvement in ways that bring positive impact on their family, their neighbourhood, their community, and their nation, recognising our inter-dependence across the world and a belonging to each other that in Christ transcends the world's usual boundaries of nationality, ethnicity, tribe, language, colour and class.

5. Every Christian needs to be aware of our dependence on and the need to care for the environment, locally and globally, and develop ways of living that do not exhaust or exploit God's creation.

In the Diocese of London they have looked at how this area can be stronger. We started more work on this with some wonderful support from our lay chaplain for the environment Sarah Ficko who has unfortunately moved to Ontario. Listen to an extract from what the diocese of London said about the way they are trying to live:

- We will strive to avoid wasting resources.
- We will conserve energy as far as possible, and obtain it where feasible from renewable sources.
- We will seek to conserve water.
- We will seek to obtain materials, goods and services from renewable sources – and when worn out to adapt and re-use them where possible; when we have to dispose of them we will endeavour to do so in a non-damaging way.
- We will consider the environmental implications of our food, where and how it is grown, transported and sold – manifesting practical love for our neighbours at

home and overseas who labour to produce the food which we enjoy; not wasting it; whilst taking due care of our bodies as temples of God's Holy Spirit.

There is much more, but you get the idea. My hope is that we will by our next synod have some guidelines for how we will live together to soften our impact.

Every province, diocese and parish of the Anglican Communion is called to produce, distribute and commend resources to help all Christians understand and live this Jesus shaped life.

We will be leaders who innovate, inspire and motivate people

This means to discover or perhaps rediscover our passion and our gifts. When you arrived at synod two lovely young volunteers took your photo with you self identifying your gifts. [Let's watch that video now.](#)

Look at all those gifts right here in the room.

If we can release these gifts more freely into our communities I know that God will take them and use them and that the church will flourish. So think for a moment where can you use your gifts tomorrow in the name of Jesus? How can it serve his body the church? How can it transform life for your neighbor?

A Non-traditional Blessing:

May God bless you with **discontent**, with uneasy answers, half-truths, superficial relationships, so that you will live from deep within your heart.

May God bless you with **anger** at injustice, oppression, abuse, and exploitation of people, so that you will work for justice, equality, and peace.

May God bless you with **tears** to shed for those who suffer from pain, rejection, starvation and war, so that you will reach out your hand to comfort them and to change their pain to joy.

May God bless you with the **foolishness** to think you can make a difference in this world, so that you will do the things which others tell you cannot be done.

If you have the courage to accept these blessings, then God will also bless you with:

happiness—because you will know that you have made life better for others

inner peace—because you will have worked to secure an outer peace for others

laughter—because your heart will be light

faithful friends—because they will recognize your worth as a person.

These blessings are yours—not for the asking, but for the giving—from One who wants to be your companion, our God, who lives and reigns, forever and ever. Amen.