

Bishop's Charge to 66th Synod
The Rt. Rev. Dr. Jane Alexander, Bishop of Edmonton
October 5, 2019

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, it is my privilege to write this report covering some of the work of the diocese since the 65th Synod in 2017. As you know I travel widely in the Anglican Communion on various committees and commissions and I am so thankful for this diocese and for the witness to Christ that I see here from person to person and parish to parish. Thank you so much for all you do to transform this world in the name of Christ. As each synod approaches I look back and see what we have been up to and every time I see a diocese on the move, trying to discern what God is calling us to do in our communities. On Saturday 5th October we will spend some time together looking at where we have been and where we might be going for the next five years. This is the new shape of the 'charge' to be given as two presentations embedded in the reports and presentations to synod. This report outlines some of the work of the diocese since our last synod.

Over the past two and a half years we have continued in our work of following Jesus by telling, teaching, tending, transforming, and treasuring. Our lay readers, lay evangelists and hospital visitors continue their valued ministry in pushing away the boundaries of the church and showing that the church is the people who make up the body of Christ and is not an institution. Thank you.

The continued growth of Messy Church has shown that by being hospitable and welcoming, families can come together and form new communities outside of the typical Sunday morning time. We have seen "Messy" baptisms, inductions and confirmations, and I look forward to a Messy Vigil next Easter. The videos which you will see at synod attest to the vitality of our ministry to children and youth across the diocese. Base Camp and Winter Camp continue to go from strength to strength with an incredible team of volunteer leaders. Sunday morning Sunday school statistics only scratch the surface of our ministry with children and youth. There is a real hunger for Christ and a hunger for community out there; I hope that some of the presentations at this 66th Synod might inspire parishes who have not branched out from Sundays to take the plunge!

When it comes to thinking about how we grow as disciples I think it is fair to say that this is an area which has been given even greater attention since our last synod. Over the past few years we have thought about our call to discipleship as discovering our ID, our identity. The I.D. initiative is a process modelled on Jesus' example of discipleship found in the Gospel of Luke, chapters 7-9. The Basic Shape revolves around Engage, Nurture, Encounter, Grow. If we are to re-discover a Jesus-shaped discipleship; if we are to truly live Jesus-shaped lives, we need to start with Jesus. It must be Jesus who defines what our discipleship is to be, not ourselves. So, our approach focuses on Jesus' own way of making disciples as found in Luke. At our last synod Archdeacon Richard King described I.D. in detail. Since I.D. is an approach and not a program we continue to learn and to develop new ways to grow in our discipleship. At this synod you will hear more about "Get to know you Saturdays" and "Enneagram Days." You will hear stories from people who, when they learned about their own call to live a Jesus Shaped Life, said they never realised

they had a gift to offer, or that they had never shared their faith story even with the people they sat with in church.

The whole I.D. process has been like a train that has gathered speed. I am overwhelmed at how individuals are responding. It is my belief that, as a diocese, we are growing more and more comfortable with openly living our disciplined life. But when I say comfortable, I do not mean like an old pair of slippers, but I mean the comfort, security and certainty that come from knowing just who we are. When a person is in Christ they are a living, breathing extension of the Kingdom of God here on earth. When a person is in Christ they are entrusted with God's message of reconciliation. The task from here is to look at how I.D., Jesus Shaped Life and the Way of Love (from the Episcopal church) can all work together and further equip us. We need to be brave enough to look at how, in a parish, the results from, for example, the Church Assessment Tool (CAT) can identify the areas in which we need to stay focused. We have great leaders across the diocese who have a passion to help, to teach and to pray. We know from looking across parishes of all sizes and locations what works for growth and what stifles it. I think it is time for us to step into the roles God has for us in the church and in the world.

Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Missional Church*, put it like this: "If we're going to impact our world in the name of Jesus, it will be because people like you and me took action in the power of the Spirit. Ever since the mission and ministry of Jesus, God has never stopped calling for a movement of 'Little Jesuses' to follow him into the world."

Will we go for God? Will we take our faith into those arguments we hear in the public square – arguments about human dignity and human hope? Do we hold up the deepest and richest examples of what it meant to be human, of what it means to be made in the image of Christ? My prayer is that we continue to look outwards, move out into the world and pray that our own Jesus Shaped Lives are attractive enough that people ask us questions and want to know more about Jesus for themselves. Please be bold and embrace a Jesus Shaped Life for yourself and for your parish.

*Draw your Church together, O Lord, into one great company of disciples,
together following our Lord Jesus Christ into every walk of life,
together serving him in his mission to the world,
and together witnessing to his love on every continent and island.
We ask this in his name and for his sake. Amen*

We have continued to work at diocesan, parish and personal levels on our task of reconciliation with the first peoples of this land and especially on Treaty Six and Eight Lands¹ where the Diocese of Edmonton is situated. In this diocese over the last 11 years we have worked hard as a community to rebuild relationships with our Indigenous brothers and sisters. This began with talking circles and an attitude of listening and then we asked a group of local elders for permission to walk together because we all understood that there was a need to form relationships. We worked to be active members of the TRC gatherings here, of the Remembering the Children work and of living more fully into UNDRIP (United Nations Declaration on the

¹ The total area of the Treaty stretches from western Alberta, through Saskatchewan and into Manitoba; and includes 50 First Nations.

Rights of Indigenous People). We have been blessed to have had the National Indigenous Archbishop visit us in the diocese and are thankful for his recent feedback on our Indigenous Doula program.

Since 2017 I believe we have seen an increase in our efforts around reconciliation, peace and justice and the personal owning of the TRC calls to action both as churches and individuals of our Truth and Reconciliation Commission which address the sharing of our real history in all its messiness, in listening to one another, in honouring those who are missing or murdered, victims of suicide, continuing intergenerational trauma from the Residential Schools.

The diocesan Indigenous Ministry Initiative (IMI) team has grown over time and consists of local elders, clergy and laity, Cree, Métis and Mohawk, and settlers including myself. This ministry initiative is a recognition of our call to serve and walk with our brothers and sisters; whether in the downtown core, or in one of the Treaty Six or Eight First Nations communities in the Diocese of Edmonton. The funding for this ministry began with the proceeds from the now wound up Provincial Missions Trust which provided \$68,163 and is now supported in the diocesan budget and through the REACH program of the Diocese. The IMI seeks to define and strengthen a focus on First Nations ministry, and to commit ourselves to listening and walking alongside. Ongoing funding of this ministry will be an important part of our diocesan planning in the years ahead.

Across the diocese we have seen Blanket Exercises, TRC exhibits, art installations, Common Ground gatherings and of course the 22 Days awareness and prayer services for MMWG (Missing and Murdered Women and Girls). We continue to work closely with Michael Lapsley of the Institute for the Healing of Memories to help us be better listeners one to another. Through the sharing of stories, attendance at educational events, powwows, round dances, Common Ground gatherings and Pipe Ceremonies I know that I am continuing to learn and grow and be blessed by my new relations and I hope this is true for you as well.

During the time that the IMI has been in place we have learned a great deal about our approach to reconciliation and healing and what respect and trust look like. We have come to understand that, in order that we do not replicate colonial works and attitudes, we must adopt a *Fresh Expressions* approach that works toward renewal and reconciliation. We have learned the importance of the use of story to bring people to the thin places where God's presence is felt, and where renewal and reconciliation are then possible. We have seen this in Messy Church events teaching about Treaty to children and their families. We have new leaders being raised up and are currently revising our formation guidelines to make the process more culturally appropriate for our new candidates. We have seen reconciliations teams forming in many of our rural parishes. Please continue to pray for reconciliation and healing in our homes and communities.

*Lord, make us instruments of your peace.
Where there is hatred, let us sow love; where there is injury, pardon;
where there is discord, union; where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light;
where there is sadness, joy.
Grant that we may not so much seek to be consoled as to console;*

*to be understood as to understand; to be loved as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen*

At our 64th Synod I asked every parish to take more seriously the call to treasure creation and in particular to look at our own consumption, particularly of non-recyclables. At our 65th Synod I brought back to you the request to use only recycled paper products in offices, washrooms and kitchens and end our use of Styrofoam and plastic cutlery. Now at this our 66th Synod we will go deeper and look at how we might live personally and corporately in such a way that shows our stewardship of creation. We will hear examples from parishes that are just starting a ‘greening’ process and from those a long way in. We will look at what an environmental policy for each parish could look like. There has been a grassroots increase in awareness and promoting climate justice. In shared use of space and community gardens, in bee keeping, in living more gently and less greedily on this earth as people have seen the link between their passion for the gospel and their passion for climate justice and they’ve found ways to share that passion and knowledge. It is my belief we are ready to go deeper. We will be asking people to take up a personal commitment to safeguard the integrity of creation – what do you think you might do? This 66th Synod begins on the feast day of St. Francis and the end of the Season of Creation that we have been called to support by both our own General Synod and the Anglican Communion. Some parishes have made a special place for prayer and action during this time, some have not. It is my prayer that each year we commit with one another to hold the space between September 1st and October 4th for reflection on the 5th Mark of Mission, to encourage, to repent and to act.

*Creator of life, The Earth is full of Your creatures,
and by Your wisdom you made them all.
At Your word, the Earth brought forth plants yielding seed of every kind
and trees of every kind bearing fruit,
the waters teemed with swarms of living creatures of every kind,
and the world was filled with every kind of winged bird, walking animal,
and creatures that creep upon the ground.
Mountains, plains, rocks, and rivers shelter diverse communities,
and through the changing seasons Your Spirit renews cycles of life.
During this Season of Creation,
open our eyes to see the precious diversity that is all around us.
Enlighten our minds to appreciate the delicate balance maintained by each creature.
Inspire us to conserve the precious habitats that nurture this web of life.
In the name of the One who came to proclaim good news to all creation,
Jesus Christ. Amen*

It has now been more than 10 years that I have served as your bishop. I have had the opportunity to reflect on what I said my hopes were for this ministry of ours together. In 2008 this is what I said I hoped to see us work on together:

- *For strength in our parishes and in our lives and to be equipped to be bold in our faith. The role of the diocese is first and foremost to support and facilitate parish ministry. I would want to ensure that clergy and laity in each parish works together to create a long range plan for these five years, the sharing of the dream of what they believe God is*

calling them to do. Then as a diocese we can use these plans to look at how best to support, challenge and grow in faith.

- *To encourage the discernment of spiritual gifts in both laity and clergy building on the ministry of existing programs so that we may all consider our call to vocation in Christ.*
- *To consider new models of ministry for some of our rural parishes and our seasonal churches that will provide stability. Rural ministry is challenging in that we have parishes struggling in communities that are shrinking and parishes in communities that are growing again after a long period of decline. I would envision a diocesan day, or retreat, on rural ministry with expert leadership extending into long term support and consultations.*
- *To define and strengthen a focus on First Nations ministry in the diocese and commit ourselves to listening and a ministry of presence. For example, in the Cathedral Friday morning breakfast program we are learning so much from simply walking alongside many inner city First Nations people. It is our turn to listen and be guided by the elders and our own Aboriginal clergy as to the way forward. The Diocese of Edmonton did not have a residential school, this is true, but the residual effects of that period of history is living among us. How shall we respond? Our response to our First Nations brothers and sisters and to the Healing Fund and Truth and Reconciliation Commission will show that we understand what it means to be bound to past events and that we refuse utterly to leave someone locked in one chapter of their life. That will be what it means to be a sign of hope and healing, to be in partnership on this journey.*
- *To help each parish plan for mission. The 2006 census information for Alberta shows that there are two population peaks, 19 to 25 year olds and 55 to 65 year olds. These groups have vastly different life experiences and different expectations of church. Understanding the community and how it changes should determine how we plan for our future, and how we need to equip our clergy and lay leaders with the tools they need to be effective evangelists in their community. Using the example of the younger group we need tools that can reach out to a largely un-churched population. We must realize that in 2008 many people have NO, absolutely NO, experience of church. We cannot assume biblical or liturgical knowledge and it makes a real difference to what we say and how we say it. The mission of the church is to invite people to turn to Christ, but how can people make this choice if no one is there to tell them of the other, to draw them into the mystery of faith? On a retreat in 2007 Brother Emile of Taize said “can it be our vocation to help let others breathe the air of the resurrection?” I believe that it is, and so our vocation as Christian men and women is dynamic and always new. The family of God, the body of Christ ever growing.*
- *I believe that the church is not here to simply maintain what was, it is the church’s vocation to grow into God’s vision of what is to be, to have the courage to reach for that which might seem impossible, for we know that nothing is impossible for Christ. The population growth expected in this diocese gives a unique challenge, a large mission field forming right here. Our communities are growing, as a church we cannot wait for them to be settled before we ask ourselves where the people will find an Anglican presence. These are prayerful conversations we need to be having now.*
- *To focus on our mission as the church of God, unity in worship, in acts of compassion and sharing the good news in Christ. I would envision spending time in each parish over*

the course of a year either in worship, parish meetings or in a pastoral visit, in order to pray, to listen and to teach.

I pray that I have been faithful to this vision and that you see our story of the last 11 years together reflected here. It has been a real privilege to serve.

The Bishop's Ministry Outside the Diocese

At their ordination bishops are asked, "With your fellow bishops will you share in the leadership of the Church throughout the world?" I take this responsibility very seriously. In addition to the work of the Diocese of Edmonton in terms of our parishes and people, my own episcopal ministry has allowed me to serve on the Stewardship Round Table of End Poverty Edmonton. I continue to present on the intersection of church and society at colleges and to community groups. I presented a TED talk at Change for Climate Edmonton in 2018.

I remain part of the Jesus Shaped Life Group of the Anglican Communion. I serve on the standing committee of the Anglican Consultative Council (ACC) and in 2019 attended the ACC triennial meeting in Hong Kong (the consultative council is a bit like the vestry of the whole Anglican Communion). I continue to take part in the Canadian and African Bishops' Dialogues with meetings since last Synod in Huron and in Liverpool. I serve on the Board of the Canadian Compass Rose Society and the International Compass Rose Society. I also serve on the North American Board of St. George's College, Jerusalem. From 2016 – 2019 I was a board member of the Public Witness for Social and Ecological Justice group of the national church.

In addition to preaching and teaching responsibilities here at home in 2018 I was an instructor at St. George's College, Jerusalem for the course "Women of the Bible" and I was the Preacher at the Diocese of Texas Annual Convention.

I hope that exposure to the church across the country and throughout the world broadens my perspective on how we might function and best share the gospel here at home. I thank you for all your prayers and for your support. We pray for this synod and our time together.

*Almighty and everliving God, source of all wisdom and understanding,
be present with those who take counsel in the Diocese of Edmonton
for the renewal and mission of your Church.
Teach us in all things to seek first your honour and glory.
Guide us to perceive what is right,
and grant us both the courage to pursue it
and the grace to accomplish it; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen*