



BISHOP OF THE ANGLICAN DIOCESE OF OTTAWA

THE BISHOP'S CHARGE TO SYNOD – 2022

He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.' And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, 'Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.' Luke 4.17b-21

1 The Gospel reading for the feast of Saint Luke tells of the early days of Jesus' public ministry in Galilee. He is in his home town of Nazareth, surrounded by familiar people, patterns, and places. As was his custom, he attends a time of worship in the synagogue, and, as he likely had done before, he reads from a sacred scroll.

Then, in this familiar context, Jesus says something new is happening. The well-known words of Isaiah, words which speak of the promised Messiah, are being fulfilled at that moment. The familiar and well-known suddenly become infused with new purpose and direction.

At this 142nd session of the Synod of the Anglican Diocese of Ottawa, we are poised to make major decisions that will infuse the life and work of our diocesan church with new purpose and direction.

The Spirit of the Lord has guided us to this point in our history. We have worked hard together as the people, clergy, and bishop of our diocese to listen, respond, discern, shape, revise, and propose what we believe God is calling us to do at this time.

We have been attentive to one another and to the Holy Spirit as we drafted three proposals which are action-oriented. These will result in significant steps to strengthen and nurture parish ministry, and offer new approaches to engage with the world—in rural areas, villages, towns, and cities.

The proposals are saying we are ready to step away from being changed to guiding change, so we can share the Gospel of God's love and healing power from a place of strength and hope.

The proposals are saying we are prepared to address urgent questions and to creatively use our collective resources to strengthen and nurture thriving parish ministries. This is worth restating: we are saying we want to consolidate our overall parish ministry structure and the operations which support it in order to have well-resourced churches that can thrive.

The proposals are saying we want lay leaders across our diocese to be well-supported and well-equipped to share in robust parish ministries. We want to create new worshipping communities and learn how to share the love of God in an age where many are very wary of religion.

We want to be part of a church that is thriving.

I am very grateful for the hours of work represented in the three proposals coming before our Synod, and I am also conscious of the hours of work we must do as the people, clergy, and bishop of this diocesan church if we adopt them—because they have to be implemented in a timely and disciplined manner. With Ascension House staff and our key lay and clergy leaders, I stand ready to make the implementation of these proposals a top priority over the next 18 months.

2 Our diocesan church is a body with two arms: parish ministry and community ministry. Our diocese, not the diocese. We, not they. Every parish is ours. Every community ministry is ours. We are in communion with one another, deeply and inextricably. And it all belongs to God in Christ Jesus.

The community ministry arm of our diocese is vital and strong, and filled with compassion, justice, and considerable expertise. Our community ministries are highly respected by others as they serve siblings who live precariously in our midst and around the world, who are often overlooked by society, who are troubled and carry heavy burdens.

The wholistic care we offer to participants in our day programs in Ottawa and Cornwall; the shelter and supportive housing we provide for women; the numerous refugee sponsorships we enable and support; and the pastoral counselling and psychotherapy we offer to individuals and families represent a remarkable expression of our diocesan church's capacity to share the love and healing power of God in Christ.

As our parish ministry arm is being reshaped to thrive, our community ministry arm is likely being called to expand—building upon competencies which have been developed over many years. We are very good at providing day programs and affordable housing, and, sadly, there is a growing need for both as socio-economic inequities continue to play out in our communities.

I firmly believe that we can build our diocese's capacity to carefully expand our community ministry to serve those who cry out for justice, compassion, shelter, and dignity.

3 In our baptismal covenant we vow to seek and serve Christ in all persons, to strive for justice and peace among all people, and to respect the dignity of every human being. Our belief is clearly intended to be accompanied by meaningful action. Our credibility in the world depends upon it.

We must continue to be intentional in the call to reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples, resourced and guided by our All My Relations Circle and four Indigenous Advisors to the Bishop (Albert Dumont, Algonquin Advisor; Margaret Lemaire, First Nations Advisor; Deborah Tagornak, Inuit Advisor; and Audrey Lawrence, Métis Advisor).

We must also continue to address racism and to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion through Project Anti-Racism, which will move from creating awareness and skills among key leaders to educating people in every ministry context. In the months ahead, our Education Committee and Human Resources Office will oversee the provision of resources for our congregations and our community ministries.

4 The Baptismal Covenant of our church also calls us to safeguard the integrity of God's creation, and respect, sustain, and renew the life of the Earth. In 2015, our Synod received the following motion, with well-informed background material and presentations made at every Great Chapter meeting:

That Synod direct Diocesan Council to chart a course for the complete decarbonization of all the buildings of the Diocese, that will involve measurable benchmarks and a defined set of actions.

We did not act decisively on this motion, and I intend to table it again at Diocesan Council, trusting that the increased urgency of the climate crisis will compel us to address its concerns in an appropriate and effective manner—with the guidance of our new Director of Property and Asset Management. Again, our credibility is compromised when we make declarations or promises and do not act on them, be they motions of Synod or the sacred vows we make at baptism.

At the 2022 Lambeth Conference, a global initiative called the [Communion Forest](#) was launched, “comprising local activities of forest protection, tree growing and eco-system restoration undertaken by provinces, dioceses and individual churches across the Anglican Communion.” The Communion Forest is described as “a global act of hope” which involves forestation activities to be determined locally so they are “geographically, culturally and environmentally appropriate.” The forest “will therefore look very different in different parts of the Communion.” Local expressions “might be about trees but could equally be about grasslands, wetlands or coastal habitats.”

I encourage everyone, in all parts of our diocesan church, to embrace this initiative, and will ask Diocesan Council to request that our new Partnerships Committee establish a relationship with the Communion Forest, so we can share with other Anglicans across the world as we contribute to the care and safeguarding of creation.

5 We are part of a world-wide Communion, and we are, in particular, part of the Anglican Church of Canada. Our Primate, Archbishop Linda Nicholls will be with us during our Synod, offering reflections on what she is hearing and seeing as we do our work.

Archbishop Linda will also speak to the [emerging strategic plan](#) of our national church, which has been developed in a consultative manner across the country, and is to be brought before General Synod for approval in 2023. The plan is entitled *A Changing Church. A Searching World. A Faithful God. Five transformational aspirations for our Church.*

We are now poised to fully implement all four of our current diocesan strategic priorities: Communications; the Shape of Parish Ministry; Engagement with the World; and Lifelong Formation. As we do so, we will find the transformational aspirations of our General Synod to be

resonant with many aspects of our life and work, and they can become important touchstones for us in the future.

6 We are still navigating our way through a global pandemic. Our parishes have lived through all stages of our pandemic plan, listening carefully to advice, and moving with concern for everyone's safety. I know this has weighed heavily on our churchwardens and volunteers, as it has on our clergy. Our community ministries have seen a greater intensification of need, and our executive directors, managers, and staff in those ministries have been fully engaged as demands have shifted—and this, too, has taken a toll.

Please continue to take care of yourselves and one another. It is okay if numbers are down. It is okay if you need to take a break or get some help. Do what makes the most sense in your particular parish or ministry context. Be sure to know when you are off duty, and fill those times with things that restore your body and mind. Stay healthy so you can serve others: self-care is not selfish.

By the grace of God, the pandemic has also made us more cohesive, creative, and faithful as a diocesan church. We have felt how resilient and determined we can be when it comes to sharing the expansive love of Christ. That strength, resilience, and determination will see us through this public health crisis and will serve us well in the months and years ahead.

The three important proposals coming before this meeting of Synod bear witness to a lot of hard work done during the pandemic. The Holy Spirit, working in us, has brought us to a place infused with new purpose and direction.

This is an exciting time, and we must seize both the moment and the momentum, and respond with faithful determination to the important tasks which have fallen to our generation. There is no doubt in my mind that our diocese has the capacity to do this, and, with God's help, we will.

Almighty God, who inspired Luke the physician to proclaim the love and healing power of your Son, refresh and renew our diocesan church, by the grace of the Spirit and the medicine of the gospel, with the same love and power to heal; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

(Collect for Saint Luke's Day, adapted)

*The Right Reverend Dr. Shane A. D. Parker
Bishop of Ottawa*