



Sermon for Mission Conference 2022  
The Right Reverend John R. Stephens  
October 15, 2022

1 Thessalonians 5:11

I am so sorry that I am not able to be with you for the Mission Conference. Unfortunately, I have tested positive for COVID 19 and I don't have much of a voice or the same energy level. Other than that, I am feeling OK.

I was so looking forward to being with so many people of our diocese at this conference. It has been a long time since we have been able to gather in person. I was looking forward to hearing from Dr. Amy Zidulka. I was looking forward to rich discussions about the many ministries of our diocese. I was looking forward to being with you as we continue to discern the calling of the Holy Spirit for us. Please know of my prayers as you gather.

*Therefore encourage one another and build up each other. 1 Thessalonians 5:11*

For as long as I can remember, within the Church there has been division manifested as internal competition with different camps amongst us rather than being able to recognize that we are all in the business of building up the kingdom or the commonwealth of heaven. We get far too wrapped up in assuming that one of us is correct and so others must be wrong, rather than

seeing that God is calling us all, each one of us, with the gifts and skills we have been given, to be part of building up the commonwealth of heaven where we are, where God has placed us. That the Holy Spirit gives a multitude of gifts to us and to the Church as a whole. Moving toward unity is what we are invited to be part of... but somehow that message has often been lost over the last 2,000 years.

My first parish was a three-point parish in south-western Ontario. This means that while it was one parish there were three separate congregations and so three separate services on a Sunday morning. Even there, when one of the congregations was holding an event: a special service of Harvest Thanksgiving, a congregational dinner, a Christian Education event, a special gathering to honour the work of particular individuals, when we did this, it was always difficult to encourage others from the same parish but who attended a different church to attend and to take part. Why was that?

Several years ago, I was the chair of a task force in this diocese entitled the Reconnect Task Force. It was a task force aimed at considering how parishes of this diocese might work more closely with one another, how they could plan to be in relationship with one another, how we might see unique opportunities because we are closely linked to one another. With a few exceptions, there was little uptake on what was presented for mostly it could not be imagined. Why was that?

In local situations, there are many churches of other denominations all around us. There are churches different from the Anglican Church of Canada but who are offering programs or events that are centred on issues or topics that are of great interest to us and yet we don't always want to participate. There are smaller towns or communities where churches face similar issues and societal concerns, but it is hard for us to work with one another. Why is that?

Therefore encourage one another and build up each other... those were the words from First Thessalonians and our theme for this day.

- What will it take to build up each other and encourage one another?
- What will it take for us to see new possibilities in working with others in our diocese?
- What will it take to help us see with new eyes a new vision where new possibilities are revealed to us?

There is a parable that is known very well to us, known as the parable of the Good Samaritan. You know the story, and you will remember that it is about a person being beaten and robbed and then left for dead on a road that no one should ever travel alone. Not long afterwards, a priest and then a Levite walk by and avert their eyes as much as possible as they pretended they did not see what could not be unseen.

And then, of course along comes the Samaritan. The dreadful Samaritan, who did not seem to know much about worshipping the correct way, who did not know the correct location for a place of worship, who did not know the years of tradition that needed to be followed, who did

not know that there were proper ways to do things. That Samaritan came by. And he did what seemed the obvious thing to do. He stopped and helped. He forgot all about the divisions and the history and the arguments and the debate and he helped this person who stupidly had been travelling along the wrong road at the wrong time.

And maybe, just maybe we are called to be like the Samaritan... I think even Jesus thought that this would be a good idea. What might that look like where you live and where you worship and where you know God's grace?

Therefore encourage one another and build up each other.



Diocese of New Westminster

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