



BISHOP OF THE ANGLICAN DIOCESE OF OTTAWA

THE BISHOP'S CHARGE TO SYNOD – 2024

For my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples. Isaiah 56.7b

Sing a new song to the Lord. Psalm 98.1

1 In my charge to Synod last year, I spoke of how Henry Chadwick, a prolific church historian, described the church as a stained-glass window—reflecting through its diverse panes the beauty of God's grace, love, peace, hope, reconciliation, and justice. And like stained-glass, which on its own cannot withstand the assaults of the elements, the church needs to be held by the oak and iron of good order and discipline. Professor Chadwick realized the structures and operations of the Church—being well-run and properly resourced—enable cohesion amongst its members and frees them to focus on serving others.

Between 2020 and 2023, you, the laity and clergy of our diocesan church, joined me in a journey of honestly assessing where we were at, and of carefully and collaboratively discerning what God was calling us to do. We worked hard together to listen, respond, discern, shape, revise, and propose what we were being called to do. We heard that our clergy and lay leaders are motivated to work together more, reach more people, enrich their discipleship, and to clarify and support shared roles. We drafted three action-oriented proposals designed to strengthen and nurture parish ministry, and to find a better way to engage with the wider community.

We gave overwhelming support to those proposals. We said we were ready to step away from being changed to guiding change, so we can share the Gospel of Christ's love and healing power from a place of strength and hope. We were ready to consolidate our overall parish ministry structure and the operations which support it in order to have well-resourced churches. We want lay leaders across our diocese to be well-supported and well-equipped to share in robust parish ministries. We want to learn how to share the love of God in an age where many are wary of religion. We said we want to change and thrive. We are seeking to sing a new song to the Lord.

2 Language is important, and the words we use to describe ourselves at this time matter very much.

It is important to use affirming words like: we belong to Christ; we are in communion with one another, deeply and inextricably; we are strong together; and we can build our capacity to serve those who seek God's love in healthy communities of faith and those who cry out for justice, compassion, shelter, and respect.

And, to repeat what I have said before, it is heartening to say we are a diocesan church, a body with two arms: parish ministries and community ministries. It is unifying to say: our diocese, not the diocese; our parishes, not the parishes; our community ministries, not the community ministries; Ascension House, not the Synod Office; our clergy, our people, our staff, our bishop, our central resources. It is empowering to say we, us, and ours. Words matter.

We need to adopt new words to speak of how we move through the temporal tasks of planning and budgeting. Some time ago, we decided to approve a new budget every three years, and saw this as practical and helpful. Now, we need to locate the setting of our budget within a more clearly defined and strategic triennial cycle.

We have learned how to listen well to one another and to the Holy Spirit as we discern the mind of Christ and build consensus around what we are called to do. This is the starting point for each new triennium. From there, speaking broadly, our triennial cycle will involve working to achieve agreed-to results, evaluating our efforts, discerning and agreeing to new priorities, and budgeting to achieve new results in the next triennium. I look forward to working with our Diocesan Council to develop and enable each part of our triennial cycle.

3 We are currently in year one of a triennium which will conclude at the end of 2026, and we are focused on achieving 6 Results that reflect our careful work of discernment and the actions and budget we affirmed last year.

Result 1 involves focussing on developing our central resources so we are less reliant on parish revenues to fund our shared operations and staffing. This is intended to leave more money in parishes. Just as every one of our parishes must seek to engage in effective financial stewardship and develop three streams of revenue from offerings, property, and investments, we, as a diocesan church, must do the same.

Result 2 involves providing increased assistance and support to parish leaders from the directors and staff of Ascension House, who offer expertise in communications and stewardship development, financial and legal matters, liturgy, human resources, governance, and property and asset management.

Result 3 involves providing guidance to parishes facing major change and promoting collaboration and innovation across our diocese. I am directly involved in achieving this result, and continue to work with parish leaders to discuss options and support their decisions concerning major change. A panel is in place to assist with other initiatives requiring innovation and collaboration. *ADOyouth* is a recent example of taking a collaborative approach to reaching and connecting young people across our parishes and deaneries.

Results 4, 5, and 6 are being addressed by our new Learning Commons, which is managed by the Education Committee of Diocesan Council. In addition, Ascension House staff have worked with others to bring much greater clarity to canons and by-laws concerning the governance of parishes.

The Learning Commons will achieve results through four distinct areas of activity: a) Ascension House will provide training and learning opportunities to help understand how parishes can operate more effectively; b) our Parish Development Subcommittee will prepare modules and sessions to provide practical instruction on how to have healthier congregations; c) our Resource Hub Coordinator is establishing hubs and knowledge networks to gather and share resources and expertise; and d) our Contextual Mission Subcommittee will help us learn how to engage with the world and establish new worshipping communities.

We must continue to be disciplined and focussed, and encourage everyone to engage in the Learning Commons activities. God has shown us what we need to do to guide change and thrive, and we need to do it together.

The Learning Commons is an important new structure that will remain in place long after this current triennium, as we must always ensure that successive generations of clergy and lay leaders learn how to do the work of parish ministry—a ministry which provides spiritual nurture, common worship, meaningful social engagement, pastoral care, and hope to hundreds of people every week of the year.

This triennium will be significant in the life of our diocesan church as we seek to firmly implement all we have carefully discerned and agreed to. As we move from 2025 to 2026, we will evaluate what we have been doing, refine our approach wherever necessary, and faithfully discern new priorities to shape and budget for the next triennium.

4 We commemorate Archbishop Willibrord as we gather on this 7th day of November. Willibrord was a medieval monk at the vanguard of the evangelization of northwestern Europe during the 8th Century. He devoted four decades to preaching the gospel, with the encouragement of his Pope and military support from the Franks.

Willibrord is rightly remembered for bringing Christianity to a large swath of Europe, and he did so with considerable skill, evidenced in the establishment of many monasteries. There are also accounts of him aggressively challenging paganism, including destroying idols and despoiling places deemed to be sacred to pagans, and by killing their sacred cattle for food.

While we can admire the deep and sacrificial faith of Willibrord, it would be unthinkable for us to have his mindset or to use his methods as we seek to engage with the world around us here in eastern Ontario and western Quebec, the ancestral homeland of the Anishinaabe Algonquins. The Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 2015 laid bare the perils and horrors of aligning the Gospel of Christ with imperial, colonial, and military ambitions.

During this meeting of Synod, we will be given a better sense for the distinction between parish development and contextual mission: if you want people to join your parish community, pay attention to parish development materials and become healthy and attractive to others; if you want your parish community to share in God’s mission to bring the rural areas, villages, towns, and cities of our diocese into the orbit of Christ’s love, pay attention to contextual mission materials—including the time of prayer.

We must always remember that God is already at work in the world, and our task is to participate in God’s work by listening in a new way to the Holy Spirit—because we cannot afford to repeat the colonial mistake of thinking we have the agenda in hand and have to convince others to follow it.

5 We are surrounded these days by some disturbing clouds of polarization, intolerance, geo-political instability, environmental degradation, and socio-economic disparity. We see these clouds in news feeds and on the streets of our diocese. We must never forget that we always have agency, as individual followers of Jesus and as a diocesan church. We always have the option of praying, donating, advocating or acting in ways that are wise and faithful.

As tensions based on toxic blends of religion, ideology, and nationalism mount in other parts of the world, it is important for us to build bridges in our own civic communities. I have recently gathered the interfaith and ecumenical work we have done for years into a new ministry of interreligious relations. This ministry will be ably staffed by two experienced priests of our diocese, who will work with me to build bilateral relationships with other faith groups—and to

model for our clergy the importance of getting to know other faith leaders in their areas. We build these relationships from the platform of shared values that serve the common good here in Canada—and standing together against hatred.

On Saturday we will hear from Archbishop Hosam Naoum in our partner diocese of Jerusalem, who plaintively says his people are bleeding at this time. Please pray, donate and reach out to individuals and agencies who are either struggling or serving to alleviate the effects of obscene violence in the land of the Holy One. PWRDF, UNICEF, Canadian Red Cross, and several other agencies seek to bring relief to those who are suffering. Archbishop Hosam asks us to pray fervently for peace, justice, and reconciliation for all Jews, Muslims, and Christians in the land where Jesus walked.

Our highly respected community ministries continue to respond to need. Belong Ottawa and Centre 105 provide sanctuary and services for people who live precariously; Cornerstone provides shelter and affordable housing for women; the Ottawa Pastoral Counselling Centre provides affordable counselling and psychotherapy; and our Refugee Ministry Office enables the sponsorship of dozens of refugees each year. Our diocesan church remains committed to addressing the need for affordable housing, which is essential in addressing numerous social inequities and human suffering. As promised last year, our Synod will be asked to endorse a new Panel on Housing Justice which will refine our approach to providing affordable housing in this triennium.

6 A short while ago, Martine Dore retired from many years as a beloved member of the staff of Cornerstone Housing for Women. At her retirement party, she shared her conviction that “everyone belongs, everyone matters, everyone deserves a second chance.”

While Martine’s beautiful words aptly describe the work of our five community ministries—each one of them an example of the fruits of contextual mission—they also lift up the heart of our baptismal covenant.

We who are baptized have vowed 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. My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples, says the Lord.

Both arms of our diocesan church, our parish ministries and our community ministries, are compelled by our love and worship of God to communicate God’s love for all people through meaningful action.

As we move through this triennium, we will continue to faithfully attend to the oak and iron that holds the beautiful stained-glass of God’s grace, love, peace, hope, reconciliation, and justice. We will strive to achieve the results we have named, evaluating our efforts, and collaboratively discerning new priorities and directions. We will cherish the beauty of Christ that has been entrusted to our diocesan church, and we will seek to share that beauty, with humble confidence and expansive generosity, wherever God is calling us to be.

Amen+

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