

THE DIOCESE OF EDMONTON

Proclaiming the Gospel – Making Disciples – Furthering the Kingdom

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To Aid Discernment in the process of raising up the next Bishop of the Diocese

What's In A Name?

Our word 'bishop' comes from the New Testament word *episcopos*. It's an Anglo-Saxon- language-development-thing: *episcopos* got shortened to *episcop*. Then somebody thought *biscop* sounded better than *episcop*. And from *biscop* it's not too far to *bishop*.

The New Testament word *episcopos* means "overseer", or "one who has oversight". You may ask: "Oversight of what, or whom?" In Christian tradition oversight has meant two things:

- 1) Overseeing the continuing ministry of Jesus Christ in each new time and place;
 - a) through the ministry of all Christians in general;
 - b) through the ministry of those ordained to serve the local Body of Christ
- 2) Overseeing and defending the unity and continuity of the Church of Jesus Christ as it has been handed down.

How Did Bishops Come to Be?

It all has to do with 'being sent'

- Jesus was sent by Father God to bring people back into a relationship with Him
...as you have sent me into the world...John17:18
- As Jesus was sent by God, so Jesus sends out others to carry on the work he began of calling the world back into fellowship with God. *And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you...Matthew 28:18-19"*

By the way, the New Testament word for "one who is sent" is *apostle*.

So off the disciples—now apostles—go, sent with a very specific job to be done in the name of Jesus. They preached the good news, made disciples, formed local bodies of Christ.

But even apostles eventually have to leave the scene: they move on, or die off. In the absence of an apostle, how does a local church body continue to grow and remain true to the apostolic teaching and leadership? The Apostles chose local *overseers* to continue their work—the work of Jesus—in a local area. In other words, they chose leaders whom today we would call *bishops*.

Soon local, solitary congregations grew. From them, new churches were planted in a city or region. *Overseers* trained and sent elders (New Testament *presbyters*—people like your rector), and deacons to minister in these new churches. These presbyters were sent out under the *overseer's* authority, which of course was under the authority of the apostle who was under the authority of Jesus himself. *Overseers* soon became *overseers* not of a single church, but of a region of congregations that developed into what we now call *dioceses*.

Bishops and the Bible

The Bible has a lot to say about bishops. Two texts begin to give us an indication of the Biblical vision for overseers.

- **Acts 20:28** from the apostle Paul to elders from Ephesus: *Keep watch over yourselves and over all the flock, of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God that he obtained with the blood of his own Son.*

Here are some foundational truths about bishops:

- The church is the Lord's, expensively bought, precious and yet fragile.
- Because it is so fragile, it needs to be handled with great care. Like a flock, leadership will need strength of purpose and direction, with patience and love.
- It is the Holy Spirit who chooses the overseer—not a job that is 'earned', or is given for personal glory or advancement. It is a responsibility given in order to serve the Lord and his redeemed people.
- A key phrase is "Keep watch". The church is always in danger of being compromised or led astray. The overseer is to be the protector and guide keeping God's people on the Way set for them by the Lord.
- **1 Peter 5:2-3.** The "Rock" writes to overseers who are living under conditions of persecution: *...tend the flock of God that is in your charge, exercising the oversight, not under compulsion but willingly, as God would have you do—not for sordid gain but eagerly. Do not lord it over those in your charge, but be examples to the flock.*

Herein lay some more foundational truths about bishops:

- The flock belongs to God. The Lord is the ultimate 'bishop' who gives the exercise of oversight to a bishop.
- To be a bishop can have nothing to do with a career move, to attain or wield power or wealth, or to satisfy ambition.
- Certain attitudes must be brought: responsibility to the Lord, a heart to tend, willingness and eagerness, and a leadership style that is shown, not through authoritarianism, but by leading the flock as the bishops themselves have been led by Jesus.

I'm getting the drift of the biblical job description for a bishop. But what kind of person are we to look for?

Others had asked the same question very early on:

- **Timothy 3:1-7:** Paul the apostle writes to Timothy (himself an overseer) in Ephesus: *...The saying is sure: whoever aspires to the office of bishop desires a noble task. Now a bishop must be above reproach, married only once, temperate, sensible, respectable, hospitable, an apt teacher, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, and not a lover of money. He must manage his own household well, keeping his children submissive and respectful in every way—for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how can he take care of God's church? He must not be a recent convert, or he may be puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace and the snare of the devil.*
- **Titus 1:5-9 :** Paul again writes to Titus (he too an overseer) in Crete: *...I left you behind in Crete for this reason, so that you should put in order what remained to be done, and should appoint elders in every town, as I directed you: someone who is blameless, married only once, whose children are believers, not accused of debauchery and not rebellious. For a bishop, as God's steward, must be blameless; he must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or addicted to wine or violent or greedy for gain; but he must be hospitable, a lover of goodness, prudent, upright, devout, and self-controlled. He must have a firm grasp of the Word that is trustworthy in accordance with the teaching, so that he may be able both to preach with sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict it.*

Since both texts share similarities, let's look closely at Titus. What kind of person ought we to ask the Lord to raise up for a bishop?

- appointed, not self-propelled
- blameless
- living an ordered family life
- not addicted to substances, or misusing alcohol
- not rebellious or quick-tempered
- not greedy for gain
- hospitable
- lover of goodness
- prudent and upright
- devout and self-controlled
- a teacher with a firm grasp of the apostolic word and teaching
- sound of doctrine
- able to refute those who would contradict the Bible and the doctrine of the Apostles.

How About a Short Summary of the Scriptures?

- 1) The Word of God in both the person of the bishop, and in the tasks of the Bishop must be central.
- 2) A Bishop's character and exercise of responsibility must be centered and focused around the person and work of Jesus Christ.

That Was Then. What About Now?

We can look to documents we use today called "Ordinals". These are words spoken and vowed by people chosen to be bishops. The Ordinals express what the Church thinks bishops ought to be about. What follows are the questions asked of a candidate in the part of the Ordination service called the "Examination":

Book of Common Prayer Pages 662 – 664

Then the Archbishop sitting in his Chair shall say to him that is to be consecrated.

BROTHER, forasmuch as the Holy scripture and ancient Canons command that we should not be hasty in laying on hands, and admitting any person to government in the Church of Christ, which he hath purchased with no less price than the effusion of his own blood; Before I admit you to this administration, I will examine you in certain articles, to the end that the Congregation present may have a trial, and bear witness, how you be minded to behave yourself in the Church of God.

ARE you persuaded that you be truly called to this ministration, according to the will our Lord Jesus Christ, and the order of this Church?

Answer: I am so persuaded.

The Archbishop

ARE you persuaded that the holy Scriptures contain sufficiently all doctrine required of necessity for eternal salvation through faith in Jesus Christ? And are you determined out of the same holy Scriptures to instruct the people

Book of Alternative Services Pages 636-637

All now sit except the bishop-elect, who stands facing the bishops. The archbishop addresses the bishop elect.

N, the people have chosen you and have affirmed their trust in you by acclaiming your election. A bishop in God's holy Church is called to be one with the apostles in proclaiming Christ's resurrection and interpreting the Gospel, and to testify to Christ's sovereignty as Lord of lords and King of kings.

You are called to guard the faith, unity, and discipline of the Church; to celebrate and to provide the administration of the sacraments of the new covenant; to ordain priests and deacons, and to join in ordaining bishops; and to be in all things a faithful pastor and wholesome example for the entire flock of Christ.

With your fellow bishops you will share in the leadership of the Church throughout the world. Your heritage is the faith of patriarchs, prophets, apostles, and martyrs, and those of every generation who have looked to God in hope. Your joy will be to follow him who came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.

committed to your charge, and to teach or maintain nothing as required of necessity to eternal salvation, but that which you shall be persuaded may be concluded and proved by the same?

Answer: I am so persuaded and determined, by God's grace.

The Archbishop

Will you then faithfully exercise yourself in the same holy Scriptures, and call upon God by prayer, for the true understanding of the same; so as ye may be able by them to teach and exhort with wholesome doctrine, and to withstand and convince the gainsayers?

Answer: I will so do, by the help of God.

The Archbishop

ARE you ready, with all faithful diligence, to banish and drive away all erroneous and strange doctrine contrary to God's word; and both privately and openly to call upon and encourage other to the same?

Answer: I am ready, the Lord being my helper.

The Archbishop

WILL you deny all ungodliness and worldly lusts, and live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world; that you may show yourself in all things an example of good works unto others, that the adversary may be ashamed, having nothing to say against you?

Answer: I will so do, the Lord being my helper.

The Archbishop

WILL you maintain and set forward, as much as shall lie in you, quietness, peace, and love among all men; and such as be unquiet, disobedient and criminous within your diocese, correct and punish,

Are you persuaded that God has called you to the office of bishop?

Answer: I am so persuaded.

The following questions are then addressed to the bishop-elect by one or more of the other bishops.

Bishop

Will you accept this call and fulfill this trust in obedience to Christ?

Answer: I will obey Christ, and will serve in his name.

Bishop

Will you be faithful in prayer, and in the study of holy scripture, that you may have the mind of Christ.

Answer: I will, for he is my help.

Bishop

Will you boldly proclaim and interpret the gospel of Christ, enlightening the minds and stirring up the conscience of your people?

Answer: I will, in the power of the Spirit.

Bishop

As a chief priest and pastor, will you encourage and support all baptized people in their gifts and ministries, nourish them from the riches of God's grace, pray for them without ceasing, and celebrate with them the sacraments of our redemption?

Answer: I will, in the name of Christ, the shepherd and bishop of our souls.

Bishop

Will you guard the faith, unity and discipline of the Church?

Answer: I will, for the love of God.

according to such authority as you have by God's Word, and as to you shall be committed by the Ordinance of this Church?

The Archbishop

Will you be faithful in ordaining, sending, or laying hands upon others?

Answer: I will so be, by the help of God.

The Archbishop

Will you show yourself gentle, and be merciful for Christ's sake to poor and needy people, and to all strangers destitute of help?

Answer: I will so show myself, by God's help.

*Then the Archbishop, standing up,
shall say:*

ALMIGHTY God, our heavenly Father, who hath given you a good will to do all these things. Grant also unto you strength and power to perform the same; that he accomplishing in you the good work which he hath begun, you may be found perfect and irreprehensible at the latter day, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Here is a role description for a bishop contained in the required vows from the current Ordinals. It is the Biblical witness enacted in practical ways. This role description insists on the following principles:

- The Lord God holds His Church in high regard (*just as expressed in the Bible*)
- A bishop is called by the Holy Spirit, not ambitiously self-selected or politically selected (*as expressed in the Bible*)
- The life and role of bishop revolves around:
 - o The scriptures as received
 - o The crucial task of teaching and preaching the scriptures (*as expressed from scripture*)
- Rooted in the Bible, maintains a high standard of doctrine (*consistent with what the scriptures said*)
- Ordering and submitting their life to Jesus (*as per the Bible*)

Bishop

Will you share with your fellow bishops in the government of the whole Church, will you sustain your fellow presbyters and take counsel with them, will you guide and strengthen the deacons and all others who minister in the Church?

Answer: I will, by the grace given me.

Bishop

Will you be merciful to all, show compassion to the poor and strangers, and defend those who have no helper?

Answer: I will, for the sake of Jesus Christ.

- Safeguards the spiritual life of the larger church (*as expressed in scripture*)
- To send others to evangelize and lead people to Jesus (*as consistent with what we reading in scripture*)
- To be hospitable; to exercise compassion and charity (*fulfilling the task of scripture not to lord it over the flock, but to care for it*).

So What's This Got To Do With Me?

The election of the next Bishop of Edmonton has much to do with you. He or she will be your spiritual overseer. The more informed you are:

- the closer your mind and spirit will be to the mind and spirit of God as revealed in scripture, and given witness in the tradition of the Church,
- the more discerning you will be in the crucial choice.

Therefore, we recommend the following prayer and study to be done with others in community:

- Study more thoroughly, and in a broader context of the Biblical text, the scriptures referred to in this document
 - o *Reading, marking, learning, and inwardly digesting* these texts will equip you as a delegate, and strengthen you as a person in your faith and understanding of the Lord's vision for the Church.
- Study the Ordinals in their entirety—preferable both from the *Book of Common Prayer* or the *Book of Alternative Services*.
 - o Learn of the gravity and responsibility of the office so that we may discern more clearly, and support more effectively the role and person of our Bishop.
- Get to know and spend time with your fellow delegates from your parish and from other parishes. Pray for each other in accordance with God's will.
- Perhaps suggest to your Rector or Incumbent that a congregational meeting be called to pray for the search and election process.
- Pray for the Church: in your parish and in this Diocese; that the Lord would raise up a bishop of His choosing in order that our Diocesan Mission and Vision may find greater fulfillment:

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