

Bishop's Charge to the 64<sup>th</sup> Synod of the Diocese of Edmonton

The Right Rev. Jane Alexander

*Jesus 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 favor.” Luke 4: 17b-19*

We are blessed to be able to gather for this the 64<sup>th</sup> synod of the diocese of Edmonton. We are into our second 100 years of ministry in this diocese and have learned so much about who we are and what we need in order to face the challenges before us. This synod is a time of celebration and challenge. I have taken the opportunity to release this charge ahead of time so that I might be able to share a little more with you than the time of the opening service allows. I will be drawing on parts of this charge during our time together.

This synod is really all about our vision and hope for the church as seen through parish and diocesan dreams for what the church is called to be and where we are called to go. First and foremost the church is about the business of knowing Christ and making Him known. It's about becoming disciples and believing with all our heart and mind and soul that Jesus wants others to become his disciple as well. Hence the theme of our Synod, “connecting with God, our neighbours and the world.” We are looking at a chain reaction that is both relational and incarnational. During our time together we will hear about diocesan and parish initiatives that look to how we will shape ourselves to be part of the mission of God in this diocese over the next five years. The incredible response to the REACH campaign across the diocese shows that we are indeed a people of hope and vision for the future of the church.

REACH is the largest and most unified campaign that the Diocese of Edmonton has ever run. We had an ambitious plan, to raise \$5,000,000 over five years with the funds raised going to parish projects (50%), diocesan initiatives (40%) and national ministries(10%). I think it would be fair to say that at the 63<sup>rd</sup> Synod when we approved going ahead with such a plan we were all a little nervous. For myself, I viewed the whole REACH campaign as an exercise in mission and discipleship. We asked ourselves questions about where we felt called to go over the next five years. We cast new visions and asked God in Christ to send us out. We prayed to have the courage to step out in faith with our talents, time and yes, our treasure, so that those dreams God placed in our hearts become a reality. Our campaign has exceeded \$4.6 million to date. Every

gift, be it large or small, has been equally sacrificial and precious. Because of people's generosity, some long-held dreams can now finally become a reality and you are going to hear about many of these at this synod. Through our presentations and table discussions we will encourage and celebrate with one another.

Let me say a huge thank you to all of you who serve the church by coming to Synod and taking part. We are blessed in this diocese to see people being called to both lay and ordained leadership in the church. We have people called to ministry seeking ordination for both diaconate and priesthood, in fact since our last synod we have celebrated 8 ordinations to the diaconate and 6 ordinations to the priesthood. We have seen growth in our lay reader training program and in our lay evangelist program. We do not expect those who are ordained or licensed to ministry in the diocese to do all the work for us – far from it, but we do know that we need people with vision and energy to invite us to go to places we have not gone before.

We know that connecting with God, our neighbours and the world requires us to form relationships and to build upon them. If we think about our theme passage for this Synod, Jesus is BRINGING good news; Being SENT out to the captives, the blind and the oppressed, and He is PROCLAIMING the year of the Lord's favour. All very active things and we as his followers are called to action. Some actions are simple but nevertheless scary. It is only three weeks since Easter when we heard Mary's proclamation "I have seen the Lord" We in our turn have seen the Lord through word, prayer action and ministry but I am not sure we have told many people about Him. This has to continue to change. When the Archbishop of York was here with us during our centennial year he said "I talk to someone about Jesus everyday" – there are thousands of people on our parish rolls – just imagine what might happen if each of us spoke to someone who does not know Jesus about Jesus everyday. We can no longer assume that the story of Jesus is known. Our evangelism efforts cannot assume that we are reacquainting people with an old friend or a childhood memory, but are often about a completely new introduction to God in Christ Jesus. And we have seen firsthand that as much as we might wish it, the prevailing culture doesn't bring people through our doors.

We have been blessed with everything we need and we are learning to be braver in using it. In 2014 we hosted Launch Pad events with Michael Harvey and over 170 people attended with nearly every parish sending someone. There was great energy and good conversations at these events which looked to a culture of invitation and boldness in planning. I am sure that in many

ways this has helped with our parish Mission Action Plans and with the REACH campaign. We also had the opportunity to hear many stories of faith which we published on the website. When a story is shared others are able to say ‘me too’ or ‘really I thought I was the only one.’ When a faith story is shared we can encourage, comfort and, above all, witness to the incredible redeeming love of Christ.

Also during our Centennial we challenged one another to read the Bible over the course of the year and I know that many of you joined in. It is my intent to run this program every year. We are a people of scripture and need to be rooted in the word.

We continue to provide resources for parish and congregational development. It is true that “There is no single recipe for growth; there are no simple solutions to decline. The road to growth depends on the context, and what works in one place may not work in another. What seems crucial is that congregations are constantly engaged in reflection; churches cannot soar on autopilot. Growth is a product of good leadership (lay and ordained) working with a willing set of churchgoers in a favourable environment.”<sup>1</sup>

We continue to look at tools that are helpful in giving us a clear picture of who we are, how we are doing and how we might focus our energies to do better – The Church Assessment Tool; Transforming Mission; Natural Church Development; Back to Church and Culture of Invitation; Mission Days – these are the local initiatives. Nationally we are part of the Inter Diocesan Learning Community on church growth and also part of the Vibrant and Healthy Parishes initiative. Learning new skills and refining old ones will prepare us to meet the challenges of reaching new people for Christ. Our results will not be seen overnight, there is no magic bullet, but I am sure that we are on the right track.

The odd thing is that sometimes we see that things work and then we seem to stop doing them. For example, when we introduced Back to Church Sunday in the diocese on September 26th 2010. We, as a diocesan family, invited people to come to church and they came. Attendance in church that day across 43 churches was up by an average of 51%. So many more people than attended on one of those days have said that they would like to come to church, even though they could not make it on that day. Some of those we invited came back the next week.

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<sup>1</sup> Professor David Voas, Data Analysis and Church Profiling Strand of the Church of England Report From Anecdote to Evidence.

We found that people like to be asked personally to come to church. That they felt included, welcomed, wanted. Each one of us wants to feel included, welcome and wanted. Because in those visceral feelings we find hope to believe that God wants to include us, to welcome us, to want us to be part of His family.

Having created a more intentional inviting church we encouraged people with Advent invitations, Experiencing Easter programs and Easter invitations and we were seeing attendance for ‘special’ seasonal services on the rise. What did we do then? Well in many places we stopped. I find it really hard to believe but we found something that seemed to help us to be brave and invite people to join us and after doing it once or twice we didn’t do it again. I hope we can get over this and get right back on inviting people to join our communities. These initiatives were **never** about increasing church attendance for one day, it was always about developing a **culture** of invitation and reminding ourselves that this is part of the mission of the church. **I am asking every parish to reinstate invitation Sundays and to consciously look at developing and maintaining a culture of invitation.**

Continuing to look at mission in our own context is incredibly important and I invite parishes who have not yet thought about hosting a mission day, or weekend, to hold one in the coming year. Six parishes held Mission days in 2014, let us try to **double** that number this year. For those parishes who held a mission day over the last 4 years perhaps it is time to offer an in-parish Mission-Shaped Ministry course. I would be delighted to help you make this happen.

*Almighty God, who by thy Son Jesus Christ  
Didst give commandment to the Apostles that they should go into all the world  
and preach the Gospel to every creature:  
Grant to us whom thou hast called into thy Church a ready will to obey thy Word;  
And fill us with a hearty desire to make thy way known upon earth  
thy saving health among all nations;  
Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Our theme passage says, **“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 favor” (Luke 4:19.** There is more than one Greek word for oppressed, but the word used can be translated as “broken to bits.” To set free those who are broken to bits by life was Jesus’ ministry and it is to be ours. Jesus shows us how the radical love of the incarnation is to be lived out. To have an active faith that asks questions such as ‘who is captive?’ or ‘what have I become blind to?’ or ‘who around me is broken?’ This is our task. To walk alongside proclaiming by our words and

by our actions that God is present. We must bring our whole selves to the task holding nothing back.

In 2011 we, the Anglican diocese of Edmonton, signed an interfaith statement on homelessness and affordable housing. We committed ourselves to work together with the city of Edmonton's 10 year plan to end homelessness. We committed to work with community agencies and partners to do whatever we could to ensure that everyone has a place to call home.

This is what we said: Our religious and spiritual communities share important values: respect for human dignity, solidarity with those who are poor and vulnerable, and an affirmation of the importance of inclusive and welcoming communities where individuals and families can thrive. *We recognize* that safe, stable, and affordable housing is a key part of this human thriving. Everyone needs a place that can truly be called home. Religious and spiritual communities and individual community members are present in every part of the city, and we commit to continue and expand our presence in neighbourhood and city wide homelessness and affordable housing initiatives. *We commit* our own religious and spiritual communities to continue to support present initiatives, to find new and creative ways to take action in support of *Edmonton's 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness* and address the issues of homelessness and affordable housing in our communities.

So what does that look like? For many churches that means making people feel welcome in the community, taking part in Habitat for Humanity Builds, providing community supports of various kinds and trying to be both proactive and reactive to the many causes of homelessness in our community. Homelessness is not just an urban issue, it is a problem in all our communities throughout Alberta. Homelessness carries with it any number of subsidiary issues. It carries with it that loss of a sense of dignity and identity which drives people into downward spirals. "It's not just the raw physical experience of vulnerability, of cold and hunger; it's also that sense of exclusion and that sense of lasting stigma which affects so many people." (Rowan Williams)

Sometimes I know that it can seem as though the enormity of this challenge is beyond us but it is not. I remember that Desmond Tutu explained how he was sure that Apartheid would end in South Africa and that justice would prevail. He said he knew it would happen 'Because Jesus Christ rose from the dead' Jesus has called us to action in his name to do whatever we can to end the suffering of people around us. Once you know the causes of poverty and don't do anything, that diminishes us as human beings. It diminishes our humanity if we don't speak out

and act to end poverty. We need to speak about our common humanity.

Shortly after I was appointed as the co-chair of the Mayor's task force to eliminate poverty in Edmonton, I received an email challenging me on the appointment and saying that they thought poverty did not really exist in Edmonton. Remembering that poverty exists across the diocese in rural and urban communities let us just think about the city of Edmonton for a moment. In 2012, 100,870 persons lived on low incomes in the city of Edmonton, a rate of 12.3%. Child poverty (children 0-17 years old) in Edmonton is at 18.4%; more than 40% of these children live in lone parent families. The majority of people who live in poverty are full time low income workers earning minimum wages. The populations most impacted by poverty are Aboriginal people; their poverty rates are twice as high as the over-all poverty rates. Foodbank use in Alberta has gone up over 48% since 2008. We as Anglican communities are in the heart of neighborhoods where poverty is rife.

The closest parishes to the 17 neighbourhoods that have "deeply entrenched" poverty are as follows:

All Saints: Downtown. Boyle Street. McCauley. Central McDougall

St. Mary: Abbottsfield, Rundle Heights, Cromdale

St. Michael and All Angels: Sifton Park, Belvedere, Balwin

St. Faith and St. Stephen the Martyr: Eastwood, Westwood, Spruce Avenue

St. Peter: Inglewood, Queen Mary Park

St. Paul: Britannia/Youngstown

St. Patrick: Richfield

In addition, there are three neighbourhoods whose high incidence of poverty can be attributed to a concentration of university students: Garneau (St. George) Queen Alexandra (Holy Trinity) Malmo Plains (St. John the Evangelist).

As parishes what are we doing to proclaim good news to the poor? Many parishes offer meals, food programs of other kinds, clothing drives, shelter. We will need to continue these efforts but we must also be advocates for the poor and challenge systems of inequality and injustice. I am so happy to see the renewed energy around social justice in the diocese and hope that every parish can have conversations around poverty where our faith compels us to ask one another questions such as 'how can we help equip people to regain control of their lives, to reintegrate into family, friendship, community; how can we help to create a society where

everyone has a place to call home?” I am pleased that at this synod we will be looking at rooting the 5 Marks of Mission in our constitution and in naming the Social Justice committee as a Standing Committee of the diocese.

*God of Justice,  
Have mercy on those who sleep on the streets or in hostels, on the floor or on a sofa,  
In store rooms or offices, and those who know their friends' hospitality is at breaking point.  
Help us build a fairer society,  
Where having no home does not exclude anyone from work and health and respect.  
Help us to build a society where all may 'dwell in safety'.  
In the name of the homeless saviour Jesus. AMEN*

In 2008 I said “If we really want young people to be part of our church what are we prepared to do about it?” A recent report from the Church of England<sup>2</sup> said that out of 12,000 churches nearly half of them had fewer than 5 under 16s and that a predictor of decline was the absence of children. We have work to do in this area. Some of our parishes have vibrant children’s ministry whether that takes place in a traditional form on Sunday mornings or whether it is happening at other times in more of a “Messy Church” context. Our parish statistics do not reflect a healthy ministry to children and youth. I know we can do better. We have a core of young people with vision and passion for Christ. We have young people who have dreams for their future and ministry in the church (over 130 came out to meet the Archbishop of York). We will be hearing more at this Synod about ministry to young adults and the new communities at Ascension House and St. Aidan’s House.

At the Bishop’s Youth Days I meet people who have stories to share and real hope for their church. As I travel round the diocese meeting young adults coming forward for Confirmation I am always inspired by the stories they share and the letters they write to me. However, when I am next in the parish many have disappeared. This is not acceptable, we have to continue to mentor and support young people in their lives in faith. We have a dedicated leader for Youth Alpha in the diocese and this seems to be producing fruit. There is new energy and new leadership emerging in youth ministry. I believe that across the diocese we are gaining a better understanding of the importance of dedicated ministry to children and families as evidenced by the many REACH campaign goals that are focused on this area but we cannot be tardy in rising to meet this challenge. As many other church bodies have found, the children of

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<sup>2</sup> From Anecdote to Evidence: Findings from the Church Growth Research Program 2011-2013

many churchgoing parents do not attend when they reach adulthood. The assumption that they will return once they have their own children is, for the most part, false. Moreover, we are in danger of making worship and church attendance or membership something we only do when we have time. I do not think that was Jesus' plan. **I am asking every parish to make teaching and discipling of children and youth a priority.**

*God our Father, we pray to you for all those who have the care of children.  
Guide them with your Holy Spirit that they may bring children up  
in the ways of truth and love.  
Through their care enable children to grow in grace  
and become daily more like your Son  
Our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.*

We have had some changes in the shape of our diocese since we were last together. We have closed St. Francis of Assisi parish in Hinton after many years of faithful ministry and the people of the parish have joined with Grace Lutheran church there. The final service in the parish showed us all something amazing. The Lutheran congregation came after their worship service to join with St. Francis for worship. As the time for worship approached the door of the parish opened and people just kept coming in. They were there to stand with their brothers and sisters in Christ on what they knew would be a difficult day and to welcome them into their family. I know how much this meant for the people of St. Francis. Our full communion with the ELCIC took on a new meaning in Hinton. St. Andrew's Morinville as many of you know was burned to the ground and after many many months of prayer St. Andrew's decided to cease. The parishioners attend in St. Albert and in Gibbons and Bon Accord, but St. Andrew's parish Morinville no longer exists. We give thanks for the past ministry of that parish. We continue to give thanks for the new parishes of St. Mark-Jieng, and St. Saviour, Wabamun. However, we know there will be more changes in ministry in the coming years as we continue to build on what we learned from the demographic surveys presented at the last Synod. We know that we need to look at our presence in new communities. I believe that looking at change as our response to opportunity is healthy and that we should be considering moving into new areas by choice, perhaps taking a healthy group and replanting. Two new committees will be formed over the coming months, one looking at where we have the right opportunities but growth is stagnant and asking ourselves what we need to do; the other group looking at where we need to be and what resources we have to do new things.

*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 are entering our 7<sup>th</sup> year of our partnership with Buyé Diocese in Burundi. We have been so blessed with this companion relationship and we will hear more about it during the Synod. We have visited back and forth in each other's dioceses and this year a team of young adults will join with young people in Buyé for a Bible camp. There has been a sharing of ideas on mission and evangelism, a partnering of parishes in both dioceses. We had a wonderful conference of the ACW in 2014 where they welcomed members of the Mother's Union in Buyé and each group shared their ministries one with another. Over the course of our partnership we have supplied tangible support through the provision of medical supplies, mosquito nets and in the building of an HIV clinic. The latest project is in the provision of dignity kits that will enable girls to stay in school during their periods. The ACW have made it possible for women to be trained for ordained ministry and through our 1% of diocesan income going to Buyé it has been possible to provide funds for the Diocesan Theological college to open for the first time in many years. I believe we are growing into the vision that we held for this relationship.<sup>3</sup>

*Gracious God, bless the theological college of our sister diocese of Buyé.  
May it be a lively centre for sound learning, new discovery, and the pursuit of wisdom;  
And grant that those who teach and those who learn  
may find you to be the source of all truth,  
Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

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<sup>3</sup> We, the Bishops of the Anglican Dioceses of Edmonton and Buyé, on behalf of our people do make a solemn commitment to walk together in faith. We pray that God will bless this partnership, will help us to experience through it the grace and peace of Jesus Christ, and will use it to make us more effective in our sharing of the good news. It is our prayer that through our partnership one with another that we might grow in mutual affection and communion, seek a more profound experience of truth, build up the Church in unity and give glory to Jesus Christ our Saviour.

Nous, les évêques des diocèses Anglicans d'Edmonton et Buyé, au nom de nos personnes prenons un engagement solennel pour marcher ensemble dans la foi. Nous prions que Dieu bénira cette association, nous aiderons à éprouver par elle la grace et la paix du Jésus-Christ, et les emploierons pour nous rendre plus efficaces dans notre partage des bonnes nouvelles. C'est notre prière qui par notre association ensemble que nous pourrions nous développer dans l'affection mutuelle et la communion, chercher une expérience plus profonde de la vérité, accumuler l'église dans l'unité et donner gloire au Jésus-Christ à notre sauveur.

Signed on this day 25<sup>th</sup> May 2009

The Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams said "For the Church of the 21st century, good ecology is not an optional extra but a matter of justice. It is therefore central to what it means to be a Christian." At our last Synod it was my hope that by now we would have moved a little further on our efforts to be a more environmentally conscious diocese. Care of creation is a huge conversation for us to have with our brothers and sisters in Christ throughout the world and I commend to you the statement "The world is our host"<sup>4</sup> for further discussion and study. However there are things which every one of us can do in our homes and in our parishes, I bring back to you the request that you think about how your parishes can be **more environmentally sound** in physical structures and in how we use non recyclables. Please once again have the discussion about using **only recycled paper products in offices, washrooms and kitchens and ending our use of Styrofoam and plastic cutlery.**

*Creator God, give us your Spirit to work together to restore your creation  
and to hand on a safe environment and climate to our children and theirs.  
Let our care for creation be our act of worship and obedience to you.  
Your kingdom come, and your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Amen.*

We continue to build on our commitment to our Aboriginal brothers and sisters, partially through the Indigenous Ministry Initiative which we will hear more about throughout the Synod, but also through the work of the National church and through the outpouring of support that came from every parish in this diocese during the TRC events of 2014. We are now in a time of living into our promises of finding new and healthy ways to walk together. I am delighted that the National Indigenous Bishop, Mark MacDonald and I will be meeting this summer to see how we can work more closely together. The national church is committed to just relationships with aboriginal peoples in church and society. Three areas will benefit from additional financial support from our diocese:

- the provision of fair compensation for full-time aboriginal clergy;
- suicide prevention among aboriginal youth;
- pastoral care for indigenous people in Canadian urban centres.

With our financial assistance, the Sacred Circle, the Anglican Council of Indigenous Peoples, the Council of the North, and the National Indigenous Anglican Bishop will steward action on these priorities. You will have noted that the first nations communities in the diocese

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/media/148818/the-world-is-our-host-final-text.pdf>

have now been added to our prayer cycle so that we have a better understanding of who our neighbours are. The Diocese of Edmonton is on Treaty 6 land. Treaty 6 was signed at Carlton and Fort Pitt in 1876 and covers central Alberta and Saskatchewan representing 16 Alberta First Nations. Since our last Synod there have been many educational events and we continue to look for ways to offer sacramental and pastoral care in ways that extend healing, reconciliation and support in issues of justice.

Our Primate ++Fred, +Mark and the House of Bishops have called for the church to have 22 days of witness in the days from Pentecost on May 31<sup>st</sup> leading up to the National Aboriginal Day of Prayer on June 21<sup>st</sup>. There is a dedicated website where you can learn more: [22days.ca](http://22days.ca). In this diocese I hope we will all enter into these days of prayer and reflection. I encourage all churches with bells to ring bells for each of the 1017 indigenous women and girls murdered between 1980 and 2012 and for the 105 indigenous women and girls classified by the RCMP as missing in suspicious circumstances, 1122 in total. The sound of the bells will indicate our solidarity with the Indigenous peoples in their cry for justice and their call for a special commission. Bells could be rung on National Aboriginal Day; 11 days out of the 22 days: or every day for 22 days.

*Creator God, from you every family in heaven and earth takes its name.  
You have rooted and grounded us in your covenant love,  
and empowered us by your Spirit to speak the truth in love,  
and to walk in your way towards justice and wholeness.  
Mercifully grant that your people, journeying together in partnership,  
may be strengthened and guided to help one another to grow into the full stature of Christ,  
who is our light and our life. Amen.*

We are still challenged in finding people to lead ministry in rural settings. We are working on this and looking at different models of training and preparation for ministry. We are a predominantly rural diocese covering an area of some 7.700 square kilometers. As many of you know the Rural Ministry Initiative of the Diocese of Edmonton (RMI), was established in 2010. The Initiative seeks to provide support in terms of collegial and pastoral support, clergy training and funding support for different approaches to rural ministry in a few pilot areas. We have great opportunities in many of our rural communities to build on existing relationships and strengthen our churches. It is often in our rural parishes that we see strong expressions of ecumenism and partnerships. Not every church will be large, but all can be healthy. Just recently I was in a rural

parish where children made up a third of the congregation, there was a real mix of people from all walks of life and ethnic backgrounds, the worship was heartfelt and when they sang I swear the roof lifted. I counted 13 people involved in the liturgy as readers, acolytes, etc. There was an incredible sense of being the gathered family of Christ. That is what we are working towards across our parishes.

*God of Mission, Who alone brings growth to your Church.  
Send your Holy Spirit to bring vision to our planning,  
Wisdom to our actions, Faith to our lives, Hope to our communities,  
And love to our hearts. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen*

My brothers and sisters in Christ, I believe that we have good news to share in this diocese and that the only thing holding us back is our timidity in proclaiming it. We do not have to look very hard to see where God is calling men and women to ministry, or to see new visions and dreams for our parishes. The Spirit of the Lord is upon us, poured out at our baptism. Therefore let us have courage and take the authority given to us and bring good news to the poor, proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, call for the oppressed to go free and proclaim that this indeed the year of the Lord's favour.

*Holy God, pour out your Spirit upon your children  
Clear our eyes so that we may see a new vision for your glory  
Stir up our hearts so that we may have a new faithfulness to your word  
Strengthen our wills so that we may find a new consecration to your service  
Let your love grow among us and your Kingdom come  
Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

+Jane