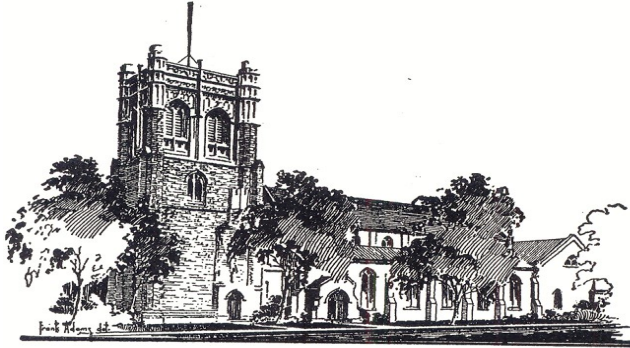


*Welcome to historic Grace Church. Greetings in the name of Christ!
We are a fully accessible, child friendly community.*

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A few weeks ago, Ruth Mahon and I attended the 180th session of Synod. It was an all day zoom meeting. Part of this meeting was listening to the Bishop's Charge. A condensed version of the charge was presented during one of our services. A video of this service has been put on YouTube. We felt that it should also be printed out so that many people can hear the message and reflect on it.

Please let us know how you feel about this message and how you think we should move forward in this visioning process.

Stay Safe & God Bless.

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The great joy is in the work of building, in the layout and construction, in the realization of a completed project. For me, the real joy of church, is seeing God go to work among us. Visiting us with newness, taking some things away, providing other things. And our efforts are joined with the action of God.

Jesus was clear. The temple was destroyed, and he did build it up in three days. But it was not another Temple. It was himself, his body – this same Jesus who was crucified. And now he continually raises up for himself a body in the world. The church. So when we gather at the table and take communion, when we say, “the body of Christ”, we are not just referring to the bread. It is placed into the open, empty, hand of a human being... A person who has been made part of the body of Christ. The body of Christ. Newness.

So, I say to you, as St. Augustine said in his time,

“If then you are Christ’s body and his members, it is your symbol that lies on the Lord’s altar –what you receive is a symbol of yourselves. When you say, ‘Amen’... You are saying amen to what you are.”

“The body of Christ”. Say Amen to what you are. And rejoice in the newness given!

Vision/Planning:

Today, offer four areas of focus... they can be our priorities from 2020 to 2025. But before we make firm commitments, I'd like to hear your input and weave in your voice, your desires, your vision. We've set up a group to help with this and to work on strategy, resources, and implementation. The plan is to bring it back to Synod May 2021 and/or a special Synod next fall, if necessary.

Vision Advisory Group: these are the gifted people who will help keep us on track. Paul Townshend, Marilyn Malton, Paul Rathbone, Tim Dobbin, Osita Oluigbo, Paul Millward, Tanya Phibbs – Function like “Vision Guides” – consulting with the various groups and individuals in our diocese between September 2020 and May 2021.

In my view, the Diocese of Huron has the opportunity to embrace the following:

Strategic Goal: To shift the centre of gravity in the Diocese of Huron from *operations* to: *renewal* and *new creation*, better revealing the marks of mission by becoming: a learning church, a just church, a diverse church, a new church.

The KEY: to be open to God's desire for us and for the world. (Phil 2) Jesus became entirely receptive to God and God's will for him and for the world. What do I mean by 'shift the centre of gravity'? One definition is that the center of gravity is “the average location of the weight of an object” the object tends to rotate around that point.

In our object, the church, we tend to rotate around the work of making sure that the operation continues, is efficient, is healthy, etc. How we operate, how we function, is very important. However, we can keep this machine running effectively and efficiently... *and still fail* to fulfil our primary mission. Especially, where circumstances have put us in survival mode.

It would be fine if we stuck with simply *repairing or replacing* things that we've always had – make new ones, just the same! We want new server's robes or new curtains or new windows. Get the same kind as before! We want the preacher to preach about something new. But make sure it doesn't look and sound too different! We want new people. But new ideas? A new way of praying? New song? No, no, the old ones suit us just fine.

Nothing new is easy. In fact, "all things made new" is one of the most unsettling and downright controversial themes in Christian life. Inwardly, most of us long for another experience of "what-ever-it-was" that was so good in the past. But more often than not, "what-ever-it-was" prevents us from experiencing God... anew. You can't go back. And if you could, it wouldn't be the same. You've changed. God has moved you to a new place. And God isn't done with you yet. A writer put it well. He asked, "Do you know what prevents you from experiencing God the most? The biggest obstacle in the way of your experiencing God is whatever your last experience of God was."

Your last experience, whatever it was, was so wonderful and refreshing and renewing, that you inevitably believe that every future experience will have to be exactly like that. And it won't be. God's promise of a "new heavens and a new earth" doesn't seem so great when we admire what we've already accomplished – We want to keep what we've built . . . the large stones of the huge temples we build around us.

What is the temple for us? What is *your* holy temple that cannot be changed? It might be a literal church building. . . but I bet you *don't* dream about that at night.

So, to begin, that's what I'm after over the next six or seven months: That together we will make a real commitment to focus on some new things... They are not really new things, they are old things... traditioned (pass on) things. Ancient attitudes, practices, and habits for a new age. For the rest of the afternoon, I'm going to outline a renewed understanding of mission. And then I will suggest four priorities for us to consider over the next 6-12 months. My hope is that by next May or in the fall at the latest, we can commit to some new way of being. Some way to shift that centre of gravity, that centre of balance, in our life together.

Mission:

The focus on mission will continue: To build on your existing Mission and Ministry Plans, but to also become more aware of the shifts *underneath* your ongoing life together, locally.

Take a look at your plan: where do these four priorities already show up? How can you “double down” and strengthen your commitment? Can you release some time and energy you spend on other things for this? What else may be a local priority? So, mission and ministry plans will continue and they will get a second look: trying to see if they can gain more focus, and depth. They seem to have helped about 50% of you, which is pretty good! They are about “who we are” and “what we do”; our identity and mission.

Mission is still a very important word for us in this time.

Meaning of Mission: Mission is not primarily a human activity.

God is carrying out God's mission among us, with us, for us and for the world. Our mission is found in God's mission—by understanding what God has done, is doing, and will do in the world. Our first task is to come to know and love this God.

That's three... to dive further into being a learning church, a just church, a diverse church...

And finally, (4) a **“new” church**.

I've got “new” in quotation marks here. This is not the kind of “new and improved” product that you'd find for sale in a store. This is not some “value-added” item that will make you feel better about yourself for a few minutes. This is the deepest, truest, form of “new” possible.

It is the kind of “new” that we hear described in the book of Genesis. God said... “let”... God said, “let... there... be light...” And there was light. Before that, light didn't even exist. Before that, no one had even thought of light. It was new. This is the new I'm talking about. “God speaks and creates something out of nothing.” This kind of new was also seen, in a new way, on the third day. Jesus was dead. Really dead. Sealed up in a cave. Three days dead. When all hope is gone. And God said, “Let...” God said, “let there be life... in the face of this death.” Get up Jesus! You are the Risen One and there is a new creation.

That is what our church is built upon. Faith in the possibility of a new creation. When Jesus was raised up, they wanted to embrace him, to cling to him. But he says to them, go... Go to my brothers and sisters and tell them... There is a new creation stretching out before you. Church life is Resurrection life. And Resurrection life is a new creation. That's the kind of “new” we are going to see. God will do this.

We are in a time of transformation and a certain *dying and rising* will be the mystery and joyride of our generation. This is our opportunity to be faithful to God, who is faithful to us.

In order to be more open to God's desire for us and for the world, I'm asking that we shift the centre of gravity in every congregation of the Diocese of Huron from *operations* to *renewal* and *new creation*, better revealing the marks of mission by becoming a (1) learning church, (2) a just church, (3) a diverse church, (4) a new church.

With the time remaining, I'll speak a bit about "Four Overarching Priorities" two at a time.

Two concepts are important to me in this:

1. "To see the whole enterprise as a **continuing conversion to the fullness of the Gospel**"; 2. A "**habitus**" can be understood as the *modus operandi*
2. at the heart of participation in the "thing of God". Anthropologist Pierre Bourdieu describes the notion of habitus as, "...a system of lasting, transposable dispositions which, integrating past experiences, functions at every moment as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations, and actions and makes possible the achievement of infinitely diversified tasks."

To be open to God's desire, we aspire to be (1) a learning church (*a disciple is a pupil of Jesus*, Rowan Williams).

Discipleship is: learning him and living in him, Jesus. A Learning Church is about formation more than information (*also necessary*). A Learning Church seeks spiritual formation that leads to changes in life that bear fruit in action. This involves us in the joy of discovery. It deepens our fascination with the scriptures and Christian traditions. It leads us to embrace of the way of Jesus. A learning church that focuses its learning on Jesus.

Image: God the potter. Possible ways to strengthen this: invest strongly in patterns and pathways for life-long learning, "edu" – drawing out. Life-long education has drawn more out of me than I could have asked or imagined. It has also been a place of renewal – renewal of faith, in the midst of new knowledge. Clergy leaders model this by being learners first, then teachers.

A DIVERSE CHURCH AND A 'NEW CHURCH'

To be open to God's desire, we aspire to be a (1) learning church, (2) a just church, (3) a diverse church, (4) a new church.

(3) **A diverse church.** "We seem to be living in a world at war with its own diversity" – this is foolishness at it most destructive. Want to see a beauty that we've never seen before in our churches? Then embrace: multi-traditioned, multi-cultured, multi-lingual, multi-racial... Unity *only* in diversity!

When I was a kid, there was no internet, no video games. I had wonderful two sisters who didn't always want to play road hockey with me, and a neighbourhood full of kids who were mostly older than me, so, sometimes I just sat on the ground and looked at whatever came along.

Blades of grass, dirt of different kinds, stones, rocks, sticks and bugs. There are a lot of different kinds of bugs and crawling things, and I was amazed by this. All right under our feet. Right under our noses.

Later, I studied Science, biology mainly, because the diversity of the natural world was endlessly fascinating. Then when I started learning more about human beings, and social dynamics, and psychology, and philosophy, and theology... I saw that there are thousands of thousands of "species" of everything. And that's just on our planet.

Look up at the stars at night and your imagination has to be stretched beyond its current shape to even take a bit of it in. And God made all of this. And loves all of this. The whole creation is almost endlessly diverse. God loves that, apparently. But some of us seem to hate it. I know that all this difference can seem overwhelming.

Jesus teaches us that God judges us to be worth loving, saving, keeping – unlovely as we are! And God considers that justice! This judgement saves us. Because the judge is just. So, we cherish and seek God’s justice for all. We WANT God to judge us—“search me, LORD”! Find what’s “off” and correct it, and heal it, and make me an agent of your justice. The work is before us. There are so many different kinds of injustice: racial injustice; economic injustice; climate injustice. So, we ask, What kind of God do we see revealed in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus? What does Jesus teach us about justice? Why is this so good!?

This is our mission:

*What has he has told you, O mortal, what is good?
and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice,
and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?*

Micah 6:8

We seek to be a more just church. Possible ways to strengthen this: focus strongly on marks of mission 4 and 5.

- respond to human need by loving service,
- seek to transform unjust structures of society, and challenge violence of every kind, and pursue peace and reconciliation, AND strive to safeguard the integrity of creation. This last one is really the one that undergirds the others – and the most overlooked in these generations: But there is a LOT we can do, with tangible involvement of youth members and measurable goals. *(eg. Carbon-reduction goals, etc)* It can serve as an example of the kind of work we’d do over the next six months, to ask questions like: What goal should we set for going carbon-neutral? 2045? 2030?