

**The Bishop's Charge
to the
39th Synod of the Diocese of Yukon
May 12, 2012**

I greet you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. May God who raised our Lord Jesus from the dead, raise up the Diocese of Yukon to be a beacon of light in this world of darkness. May we, as the Diocese of Yukon be used of God to share his light and love to the people we encounter each day.

I am glad that you have come and praise God that you are with me as fellow servants of our Lord in this wondrous Diocese. Without you God's work would not be done for he works through you his Servants.

Our theme of the Synod is "Getting Back to Basics". I believe, if we want to grow as Christians, if we want to grow as a Church, we have to go back to the basic or essential disciplines of Christian growth which seem to be neglected in our diocese. Throughout this synod we will have short talks on "Prayer", "Personal Devotions", "Outreach" and "Bible Reading". It is hoped that this synod will help us to commit ourselves to getting back to the essentials of our faith. At the end of this charge I will issue a challenge to engage in a course in Daily Bible Reading. This will help us to return to this essential discipline.

We are in a time when people outside our diocese are questioning whether we should exist as a diocese. There have been no direct questions but a lot of implications. Both from within the National and the Provincial committees on "Governance" there are questions as to whether there is a need for so many dioceses. There are hints that so many paid clergy or so many parishes are needed to make up a diocese. Questions are asked everywhere but not at us directly. When we are the smallest diocese in Canada, at least when you look at paid clergy or parishes, I know that some of these questions are pointed at us. But nobody has asked us directly what we think.

Again if we look at the financial situation of the Anglican Church of Canada the prospects of the Diocese of Yukon are not good. At the recent meeting of the Council of the North we were told that the revenue of the National Church is worse than they had planned for. Due to declining attendance, and therefore declining revenue, many dioceses are no longer able to give to the national church as they once did and in some cases cannot keep their current commitment to the National Church. For one reason or another there is less money given to the national church by individuals. This affects the Council of the North from which we receive half of our revenue. The money given to the Council of the North will drop a minimum of 5% for the next four years. This means, with the new formula that the Council of the North is using to distribute grants, that the Diocese of Yukon will get the following: In 2012 we received \$250,000.00. In 2013 we will get \$223,000.00. In 2014 we will get \$212,000.00 and in 2015 we will get \$201,000.00. Depending on what the Nation Church does, these amounts might be less but they will not be greater. This is not surprising really, when two of the factors taken into consideration are the number of parishes in the diocese and the number people who go to church. We will deal with this loss as we always have. We will use what is given to us with the best stewardship we can to

God's Glory. We will serve our Lord using the resources we have. We can do no more than this. And we will do no less.

There is one area that we can make a difference to our Church. And that is in our own parish giving and fulfilling the commitments we have already made to our diocese. If all the parishes paid their commitment then our current situation would be much better. As parishes, we need to take seriously the possibility of taking on even a greater commitment to the support of the Church in the Yukon.

Part of our problem is how we see ourselves. For many, we see ourselves as individual parishes taking care of ourselves without taking notice of our neighbours. For many, the Diocese is those people in Whitehorse that do not seem to have anything to do with us. We see little or no connection with our neighbouring parishes. This is a recipe for physical bankruptcy and spiritual death.

If we want to survive, we must see ourselves as the Diocese, as the Church, as the Family of God. We must see ourselves as part of each other, as brothers and sister in one Church. It is together that we will be the strongest and together we will grow in the strength and grace of God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

We need to seriously look at what God wants of us in the future. It is my current belief that a merger with a diocese in the south, for various reasons, would not be practical. For those who wish to know more please read the article in the Northern Lights entitled, "*Why Are We Here?*". One practical suggestion of merger was the one which included the Yukon and the NWT - that held promise and after discussion, this diocese supported the idea in principle and the Diocese of the Arctic has still to discuss it at their synod. As they have just had a synod and an election of a Coadjutor Bishop, further discussion could be a long way away in the future. At this Synod, a committee will be formed to look at this and other options for our Diocese. We must come to the possibilities of what God has for us with a prayerful but open mind.

As a diocese, we will continue in our service to God, the people of this diocese and the world. We will deal with the lessening finances and seek ways to serve under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. I want to take this time to tell you how we are dealing with these issues.

Personal Growth

Any change must begin with us. How are we seeking to ensure that we are growing as a Christian? We need to ask ourselves, 'how are we as individuals serving the Church?' My wife Sheila and I have regularly examined how we, as a family, serve God and the Church. We have begun by making a conscience effort to give 1/10th of our income to the church as scripture teaches us. We have tried to use our skills and time to serve our church in the community around us. Each of us needs to ask "how do I serve the Church?"

I have asked Archbishop Terry to organize the Bishop's School for Yukon Ministries. The next Bishop's School is set for November in Whitehorse. We are also getting requests from parishes for training in specific areas. The Bishop's School will also seek to accommodate these requests.

If your parish has a need, please contact the office or Archbishop Terry and we will include it in our plans.

I have asked Ms. Beverley Whitehouse to be our Anglican Fellowship of Prayer representative. She will be contacting parishes with resources that may enhance the power of prayer in your community. I would take this moment to ask if your parish has a regular prayer meeting or a bible study where time is taken to pray for your church, your community, this Diocese and the world?

During this Synod, resources will be made available to challenge us in our reading of the Bible. Scripture Union of Canada has created a program called E100. This is a challenge for us to read 100 bible passages (50 Old and 50 New Testament). Each of you received two booklets, one to help you keep track of the readings and one that has a series of questions on the readings. These questions can be done alone or in a group, they are intended to help us think of the passage. We have some copies that can be taken to your parishes. I only ask that if you take them, you use them. Also remember that there are fourteen parishes represented here, if you need more you can purchase them from Scripture Union. I am personally doing this over 20 weeks, which is one reading a day, Monday to Friday.

Telling Our Story

The story of the Diocese of Yukon is one filled with faith and adventure. In the first half of the 1900s through the Bible Missionary Society it was a story that inspired and encouraged Christians around the world and can do so again. By telling our story it is hoped that we can create a "Community of Believers" who pray and support the Diocese of Yukon. We are producing a pamphlet that will extend an invitation to have the Bishop of Yukon visit their parish or diocese and speak of what God is doing in the Yukon. These pamphlets will be going to all of the dioceses in the USA and England.

Sharing Our Ministry

We also want others to be part of our Ministry. The Diocese is creating a program that will invite Mission Teams to come to a community and be part of the parish for a week or so. They would help the parish in any way they could. They could possibly help in areas such as repairs or building and holding Vacation Bible Schools or Bible Studies. They would come and share their talents and skills and we would provide them with accommodation and a Northern Experience. When I was in a parish, we had several mission teams visit and the experience was beneficial to all concerned.

Ministry of Presence

We are faced with having too many parishes and not enough paid clergy in our diocese. How do we minister to the many vacant parishes? We have started the Ministry of Presence where clergy or experienced lay people, who have their own means of support, are invited to come to be in a parish for a minimum of one year. Although the workers are asked to ensure that there are services, they are mainly the presence of Christ and the Church in the community. They live in the rectory and serve the people of the community. Currently, we have the Ministry of Presence

in three Communities and hope to add another two within the year. This is not ideal but it can be a beginning of the church being revitalized in our communities.

As we continue our journey I have two joyful announcements that I wish to share with you. First, we have been without a Dean in the Diocese for several years. I am glad to announce the appointment of Sean Murphy as Dean of the Diocese of Yukon. I have every confidence that he will take up the challenge in his service to God and the diocese.

Second, I have the honour as bishop to recognize long outstanding service to our Diocese. I do that by making people Canons of the Church. I wish to announce that on Sunday I will appoint David Pritchard to be a Canon of the Diocese of Yukon. Both as a lay person and as a Priest, Rev. Pritchard has faithfully served God in this Diocese. Even now, retired, he puts in hours of volunteer service. It is hard to keep track of him sometimes.

The people of this diocese are a strong people. We know what hard times are about. We have had times of many resources and times of very little. We will face the future with confidence and the knowledge that Jesus our Saviour walks with us. We will continue to serve our God in the wondrous land He has given us. We will not only survive, we will be victorious in God's merciful and mighty hands.

The future of this Diocese is in God's hands. God has given us the diocese to manage. It is our responsibility. We can no longer rely on the Church in the south. It is not their responsibility. It is ours - yours and mine. Together being led by God, being indwelt by the Holy Spirit and having Jesus to walk with us, we will move forward. We can become a bright lamp for God. A lamp that will be seen around the world. A light that will radiate God's love and salvation. Come with me on this journey. It will not be an easy journey as there are a lot of potholes on the road. But with Jesus by our side, guiding us, we will become a shining lamp for God our Creator and Lord.
Amen