

The Bishop's Charge
41st Synod of the Diocese of Yukon
May 4 and 5th, 2018

Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

I welcome you to this opening service of the 41st meeting of the Synod of the Diocese of Yukon. The theme of this Synod is 'Love in All Things'. I just want to say that I am privileged and honoured to be your Bishop at this time.

What attracted me to believe in Christ was the fact that He loved me so much He died on my behalf. What attracted me to the Anglican Church was the love I felt among the people of the parish I was involved in. What attracted me to ministry was Christ's call to share His love and salvation with others. What keeps me in the Anglican Church is that same call to love others. Christ's love, I try to put that first in all aspects of my life. As a person, as a husband, as a father, as an Anglican, as a priest and as a Bishop. Yet, I have to say, that over the past few years one of my biggest sadnesses is the evidence that as Anglicans we have forgotten to love as Christ loved. Christ's love always puts the needs of others before our own. That sacrificial love led Him to the Cross. I have said before that what brought me to tears at our last General Synod was how we treated each other. How we had forgotten to love each other as Christ loved us. For the first time in my life I was ashamed to be called an Anglican. As a Church, when we do not put Christ's love first in all our discussions, it should not be surprising that the results of those discussions should continue to bring disunity, anger and sadness. For when Christ's love is absent, Christ is put on the sidelines and sadly becomes an observer.

When Rev. Kirkby first came to this land over 150 years ago to share God's amazing love to the people here, I wonder what his thoughts for our future were. He came back from his long trip with such positive stories about the people of this land that he called for someone to go and live among the people to share the message of the Gospel and God's Love. The call was answered by a young Metis teacher who came to live among the people and teach of our Saviour and the need to know Him. That man, we know as Archdeacon Robert MacDonald, and the Diocese has been changing ever since.

Change is something that we should be used to in our Diocese. Despite the attempts by some to stay the way "we've always been", it can not be done. We are not what we were yesterday, and we will not be tomorrow what we are today. If we

do not change we will fade away. At this time, we face changes from outside our Diocese that will call us to change and will affect us greatly. A few are the following:

1. **Anglican Council of Indigenous Peoples and their growing sense of representing the Indigenous people of the Anglican Church of Canada.**

The most recent information that has come out of ACIP regarding how they would like to represent the Anglican Indigenous Peoples of the church is not yet determined, but what is talked about goes something like this: They would like to have an organization within the Anglican Church that would have no boundaries but would contain selected dioceses, parishes, groups and individuals that would look to an Indigenous Bishop for leadership. It has been discussed that they would begin small with only one or two dioceses and selected parishes. These would be chosen by a group within the ACIP organization and invited to join. To date there are many unknowns. I suspect that there will be much discussion of this at The Sacred Circle this summer. We are sending three Indigenous delegates from this diocese, as well, I will be there as an observer. I have, more than once, expressed a willingness to discuss what participation our diocese might have in such a group, but I suspect that by the silence I got, that we are not part of the small group they are thinking of starting with.

2. **The Marriage Canon.** At the last General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada there was a motion to change the Marriage Canon that received its first passing vote. As this is a change of the Doctrine of our Church there is a requirement of two votes at two consecutive Synods. Each vote must be passed with a two thirds majority in each of the three houses (Laity, Clergy and Bishops). The second vote will take place at the upcoming General Synod in the summer of 2019. At this synod we will elect delegates to attend that meeting. If this motion is passed it will allow the church, at the Bishop's discretion, to permit clergy to marry same sex couples. This is a very significant change in the Church's Doctrine. If passed, this Diocese will have to deal with several questions in this area. As a Synod we will have to make some decisions as to how to move forward.

3. **Growing Extremes in Our Church.** The Anglican Church has always been a Church that lives with differences. Disagreements are not new for our Church. But we have always thought to come to a compromise that comes through much discussion, often over many years. Often the end results does

not seem to please anyone fully, but it was a decision that we could all live with. To my sadness and disappointment the extreme views in this church are growing wider and wider apart and the result is a lack of ability to love each other and a growing inability of the extremists to talk or listen to each other. Already I have felt pressure from some to pull away from those who may disagree with me and have felt others pull away from me because I refuse to be separate myself. Love does what is best for the other, often at a personal cost to yourself. As the extremes widen, so will the pressures from outside our Diocese become stronger.

As we, as a Diocesan family, move forward in love, we need to equip ourselves to serve those around us. We do this in several ways:

- 1. Ministry of Presence.** This program of inviting experienced volunteers into our Diocese for a year at a time, has been a blessing to us. Those who have done so have all done amazing work in the communities and I am very thankful for what they have done and do. At present there are two more communities available for people to serve as volunteers.
- 2. Locally Trained leadership.** For years this Diocese has been blessed by great leadership, both lay and ordained, who have received their training, for the most part, from the Bishop's School of Yukon Ministry. There are also numerous Lay Ministers serving. Without these people, this Diocese would not function as well as it does and I thank them for their many efforts.
- 3. Distance Learning.** Besides local training we are blessed with those who have committed, through the Bishop's School, to distance learning from an theological institution outside the Diocese.

Most of these ministries are non-stipendiary. Ministry costs are given but no salary is paid. They juggle their ministries among jobs or retired life. I cannot begin to express my gratitude for them and the sacrifices they make for the service of God and this diocese.

- 4. Stipendiary Ministers.** From the three Stipendiary positions, as Bishop, I expect and have received not only fine leadership in their parishes but to the Diocese as a whole.

As I look out at our Diocese I am aware of a need for a renewed effort for the training of local people and especially First Nation people for leadership in our

Church. I am also aware of areas in our Diocese where we need to start new ministries, where needs have been neglected or have sprung up anew. Two of these areas are requests for ministry in the Faro, Ross River area and the Whitehorse inner city area.

As we look over the past few years since our last Synod, I am aware that only the Cathedral, Northern Apostles and St Martins has have licensed new Lay Ministers. I have heard the frustration of some that they can not find candidates, or that things are just too busy to start something new. If we do not get new leadership in some of our parishes soon it will be difficult to continue even the level of ministry that we have. We need to seriously look at our parishes and identify and begin to mentor younger leadership. For years now we have been declining in attendance at our services. We have fewer and fewer signs of local leadership and much of what we have are considered elderly. Currently we have one Lay Minister under 50 years old. All of our ministers are over 50 years old, some of those are retired volunteers. This paints a bleak picture of our diocese. If this does not change we will continue to diminish and become more and more irrelevant.

In regarding this, I would suggest 2 things. Firstly we need to begin a concerted effort to begin a mentoring program with the specific goal of raising up new and younger leadership. This will mean identifying potential leaders and speaking to them about training. It may mean consulting with the local bands to see if they could identify possible leaders. It means giving responsibility to these same people. More difficult for many of us, it will mean giving up control of aspects of our ministry. It is my experience that some of us have issues of control that seem to at times hinder our allowing others to minister.

The second thing I would say is that it means that we will have to work together in training up these new leaders. I have said before that we no longer need a Lone Ranger attitude. Communications, travel are better than ever. We can get together, we can share our skills and resources. If we can not work with those around us then we really need to ask “Does God want me here? Do I need to make changes in my life and attitude? Is God leading me elsewhere?”

In the Convening Circular of our last Synod Archdeacon Munro and Rev. Gough wrote a very fine report of outlines for three separate licensed ministries of our diocese. These were for Chalice Bearer and two levels of Lay Ministers. I hope that we do not end there but begin to flesh out with more detail the contents of these programs with suggestions of how they might be delivered. The 10 week course for Lay Ministry is one curriculum for the first level of Lay Ministry. It

would be good to see something similar for the other two so when there is a need for training we are not starting from the beginning wondering how do this or where we can get materials to do so.

To try to meet these needs we have done some reorganization of the Diocesan structure. We have renewed and reinstated the positions of Archdeacon of Liard and Archdeacon of Klondike. Archdeacon Sarah Usher has taken over the duties of Priest in Charge of Northern Apostles which will allow me to spend some time working with the Cathedral to increase its Ministry in the inner city of Whitehorse. Hopefully these changes will better allow us to reach out to a larger group with God's love and His salvation.

I feel I need to say something about who we are and our work in this Diocese. None of us belong to big parishes. None of our immediate parish commitments should take up all our time. As a parish minister for over 30 years I would fill up some of my time doing community service. It was good work, it was outreach. But as my parish grew and as I began to take on more responsibilities in the parish and diocese I found that I had to give up some of this good community work so that I could better serve the Church. This was not easy to do, but it was what needed to be done. It may be that some of us have gotten so involved in Community service that we do not see what needs to be done in our church or that these community services take priority over the needs of the Church.

Change is happening within our National Church. Add to this, the fact that because of the financial situation in the National Church the help we get from the Council of the North may lessen. If we are not prepared to meet these challenges there may be pressure from outside our Diocese to bring changes that are not of our own choosing or making.

As a Diocese we need to look at stabilizing our financial position. This is one of our great weaknesses and one of the only ways changes, not our own, can be imposed on us. We need to look realistically at our financial needs and begin to plan financially. As in the case of our training, we need to begin to think outside the box and in ways that we have not done in the past. We need to think of a local and diocesan Financial Campaign. This is not an area in which I know much and we cannot afford to hire a professional. But we need to think of our own personal giving. We need to look at ways that people can give through wills, insurance policies, and other forms of giving. We may also look at beginning some form of money making business to help support the Diocese in the future. I would suggest we have a committee to look at the possibilities. In Whitehorse there are several of

the Churches who survive because they also run a commercial business to keep them afloat. The National Church can help to give us some possibilities in regard to wills, or insurance policies. If we are not ready financially then we leave ourselves open to having conditions put on us that we might not like or choose.

Twice I have planned retirement, and twice I have delayed it because of my love for God and the people of this Diocese. That's what love does, it puts the concern of others over our own. It is my prayer that as we move forward into the future we will commit ourselves to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, body and mind, and to love our neighbors as ourselves. And may we love as Christ loves us.

Respectfully submitted
Bishop Larry Robertson