

Response to the Bishop's Charge  
The Forty-seventh Synod of the Diocese of Algoma  
May 9, 2015

The Lord be with you.

**And also with you.**

Lift up your hearts.

**We lift them to the Lord.**

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

**It is right to give our thanks and praise**

The Committee for the Response to the Bishop's Charge respectfully offers the following comments:

We are heartened and encouraged, Bishop Stephen, by both the tone gratitude and the content of your charge. John F Kennedy wisely noted, "As we express our gratitude, we must never forget that the highest appreciation is not to utter words, but to live by them."

You have called us to live lives that speak our thanksgiving not only in words but in concrete actions. The emphasis on God's work in our midst, the hope that shapes our life together and the expectation of God's leading and provision in our future is clear in your Charge. We also appreciate your leadership in encouraging us to look further than the concerns of our own parishes and even our Diocese to God's work in the Church beyond our borders.

As the body of this 47<sup>th</sup> Synod, we wish to offer our thanksgiving for your ministry, Bishop Stephen and for the ministry that Fawna exercises among us. We experienced the ministry of hospitality last night at Bishophurst. The pastoral care you both offer to us is a rare gift, for which we are truly grateful.

We lift our hearts in thanksgiving for our ongoing relationship with Bishop Lydia Mamakwa and celebrate the establishment of Bishop Lydia's episcopal ministry within the borders of our Diocese. We recognize that as a testing ground, the people, clergy and officials of Thunder Bay-North Shore Deanery need the prayers and the support, not only of our bishop but of the rest of the Diocese as we partner together with our indigenous brothers and sisters and work together as the hands and feet of the Body of the Living Lord. As we do so, the same posture of ecclesial humility that you call for in our response to the church's cultural marginalization is required if we are to faithfully come alongside our indigenous brothers and sisters in the propagation of the kingdom of God among us. Truth and reconciliation will only find a home in a body that is given to this ministry of mutuality that is manifesting among us in the Diocese of Algoma. For this we give hearty and humble thanks.

This posture of humility is a virtue born of gratitude. And so, it is with grateful hearts that we fully support your desire to take some practical steps. As you are aware, this Synod body has already taken steps to ensure that the ACIP representative on the Executive Committee be henceforth considered a full

voting member of that governing body. We encourage your desire to see our Diocese, and in particular the Thunder Bay-North Shore Deanery, work in close relationship with Bishop Lydia to identify, train and license indigenous Lay readers which potentially will meet deep pastoral needs within the community, being aware that practical issues surrounding polity and governance are sure to arise. We are confident in God's guidance as we meet these challenges.

We were moved by the Primate's words over these last days and we fully endorse his request that every Parish observe the "22 days" initiative. As well, the ringing of the bells will give voice to our thankfulness for the reconciliation that has occurred and our commitment to continue walking together into deeper healing. We pray that the suitcases that have been, and are being, emptied of the shame, anger and resentment from the past may now not be empty but filled with grace, forgiveness and joy.

We also fully and wholeheartedly support the request that we, as a Diocese, in our Deaneries and parishes pray for the partnership with our indigenous brothers and sisters, that God may grant us wisdom and humility as we forge a path together, and that God may grant us clarity as we discern and navigate through the practical challenges that we will meet along the way.

We lift our hearts in thanksgiving for your vision and leadership in establishing our relationship with Bishop Mwita and the Diocese of Tarime. This holds the potential for much benefit for both Dioceses. As you point out, the opportunity to engage our youth and others in real mission is significant and we note that without your own youthful experience, we might not even have you for our Bishop and leader.

And while we are thankful for the help we have been able to give our Tanzanian brothers and sisters, we must disagree with Bishop Mwita's statement that they had nothing to give us except their prayers and thanks. We are intensely aware of the substantial gifts we have received.

The joyful worship and growing Christian community is and can be a model for us as we struggle with our North American churches in decline. The commitment of our brothers and sisters to labour for God's Kingdom under difficult circumstances calls us to ask "what can we do to foster the idea and acceptance of 'costly discipleship'". Can we get people to look not only outside their own church, but their own deanery, and even diocese to God's plan in the world as we can dimly perceive it? Can we see how that growth and love of God could be the model that we so desperately need? We are not necessarily the givers in this relationship as much as possible recipients, if we can but open our hands to receive rather than close our fists on our money, resources and ideas. Your emphasis on gratitude and generosity, Bishop, can find real expression here.

How can we keep our focus on Tarime and their needs and, equally important, how can we keep gratitude for the way they encourage us? We fully support your call to add specific prayers to the weekly intercessions and to use the Algoma Anglican more effectively. We are excited about the prospect of a visit by Bp. Mwita and the possibility of another group visiting Tarime, especially with the

emphasis on youth as participants. May we suggest that some relationships might be established beforehand via electronic communications? We also suggest that individual parishes consider “partnering” for prayer and information with particular Tarime congregations. Perhaps other such inventive efforts as the Sunrise Coffee project might be explored.

Turning to our more local situation, with you we recognize that our church faces significant challenges. First, there is no doubt that the matters facing the church are serious and you are right that any growth or vitality will surely flounder upon the rocks of division. And so, we join you in your prayer that we would, in all things, strive to be God's reconciled and reconciling community. We will need to be continue the hard work of being a community that decides to love, making sacrificial choices that put the furtherance of God's Kingdom before all else.

As to the challenge of raising the bar in preaching, we strongly affirm your call to make better preaching a priority. Perhaps Bishop, we could consider the development of a lay school of preaching, raised up from the unique gifts you mention that we have here in Algoma. We can envision the development of a curriculum focusing on preaching, perhaps in relationship with Thorneloe University that could be taught at deanery levels with lay readers earning something like a certificate in lay preaching.

We lift our hearts in thankfulness for the leadership in our parishes, lay and ordained. We are keenly aware of the costly discipleship this often requires, particularly in more remote areas and during interregnums. We believe that the idea of offering support for paid internships in more remote areas is worth exploring.

The issue of interim leadership is especially concerning and we encourage you to continue to explore creative ways of resolving these difficulties. The idea of lay stipendiary ministry is worth experimentation over the next two years. We would suggest that such lay ministry, where possible, be exercised by someone from a neighbouring parish to avoid potential future conflicts when the new Incumbent is established. We would encourage you to explore this with a sense of urgency and experiment with it, evaluating the outcomes at next Synod. We are concerned that delay will feed the spirit of “capitulation and a defeatist attitude that will be at odds with the message of resurrection”.

In the Diocese as a whole, the encouragement of an attitude of expectation and hope rooted in a spirit of gratitude that reflects God's goodness to us is essential. We heartily support the “Lift Up Your Hearts” initiative and see this as a dynamic way of deepening the growing hope that is shaping our Diocese.

We lift our hearts in real gratitude to God for the contribution of Dr. Jay Koyle and the Strategic Plan Implementation Team. With you, we support the use of the ‘Core Values’ as a framework for both prayer and ministry. We agree that a spirit of humility and a focus on discipleship, and service will be essential to build the Church in our future. We, with you, believe that growth and vitality will come from formation rather than programming. We believe this will produce a spirit of creativity and freedom, as well as openness to change. We are encouraged by

the change in the conversations that are being experienced at the grassroots level and these will need to continue at progressively deeper levels to transform our minds after the mind of Christ. The “Lift Up Your Hearts” initiative will continue this work. Beyond this, it will be crucial for individual parishes and deaneries to continue to ask hard questions and take creative actions.

We are coming to realize that the essence of the church is not the beautiful buildings in which we worship, nor even the lovely chalices that hold the precious wine, but rather, the essence of the church is the living Lord whom we meet in Word and Sacrament and who sends us out to be his living vessels, the very chalices that administer the blood and body of Christ in a tangible way to a world hungry and thirsty for God. This, at its core, is the good news of the gospel that will cross cultural, racial, economic and social barriers.

We thank you, Bishop Stephen, for once again reminding us of the hope that lies within us and calling us to lives of “wonder, love and praise”. As the body of Christ we have been graced with God’s great love and the Spirit’s power breathing through us. May we, with you, be intensely thankful people who translate that gratitude into lives of joyful service, shaped by the hope that lies within us, all for Christ’s sake. Amen

And so we say:

Lift up your hearts.

**We lift them to the Lord.**

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

**It is right to give our thanks and praise**

Respectfully submitted

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