



The 162nd Synod of the Anglican Diocese of Montreal

The Bishop's Charge

May 14, 2021

We acknowledge with respect that this Diocese of Montreal is on the unceded traditional territory of the Haudenosaunee, the Anishinaabe and the Wabanaki people and that our Diocesan offices are in Tiotiake (Montreal), a meeting place for many. We respect the continued connections with the past, present and future in our ongoing relationships with Indigenous and other peoples within the Montreal community. May God our Creator guide us in wisdom, justice and peace.

Welcome to our second Diocesan Synod in Pandemic-tide and our third one focusing on *The Challenges of Evangelism*. I wonder how your thoughts and attitudes have changed since we began discussing this topic together. I believe that the experience of being disrupted during the pandemic, of ever-changing conditions and of the need to adapt has had a cleansing and renewing effect for many of us. Very few of our past routines and community activities can be taken for granted anymore. So, how are we organizing ourselves? Who are we reaching out? And, indeed, what are we inviting people to?

This year Synod gathers in Ascensiontide, the period between Ascension Day, which was yesterday, and Pentecost Sunday, which is in 9 days, on May 23. The Gospel of Luke (24:44-54) tells us that after he rose from the dead, Jesus reminded the disciples of their mission to tell others about repentance and God's forgiveness which is offered to all who trust in him. He said that they should wait in Jerusalem for God to clothe them with power for this work. Then, Jesus

led the disciples out of the city of Jerusalem, blessed them and was carried up into heaven. Remember: this was not at all what the disciples of Jesus were expecting!

During this disruptive and confusing time for the disciples, they tried to figure out what would be coming next and how they would know what to do. But they were also excited and inspired. They spent their time worshipping God and living in joyful expectancy of what God was going to do in them.

I believe that we stand on the threshold of some exciting possibilities in ministry; this is a chance to launch into greater cooperation with God. Let us celebrate God at work! Let us listen closely for his guidance and step out boldly.

The ten days between Ascension Day and Pentecost are being used as a focus for "*Thy Kingdom Come*", an international wave of prayer around the world, initiated by the Archbishops of Canterbury and York. People are invited to use this time to pray for 5 people they know to come to a living faith in Christ. I have asked our diocese to focus on praying for renewal and revival – in our own lives, in our parishes, in our communities, in our whole diocese. Where do you hope to see God moving in our diocese or in your life? Undoubtedly you also have some people you want to pray for individually as well. There is an app for that! The [diocesan resources](#) can be found on our web site and you can find other information at <https://www.thykingdomcome.global/>.

At a more nitty-gritty level, this coming Sunday has been designated as Jerusalem Sunday. Please pray for the peace of Jerusalem, now more than ever, in light of the current conflict which is disrupting the fragile state of affairs. Pray for their Bishop, Hosam Naoum, who was installed as Archbishop yesterday, and for the small group of Christians who live and work and minister in that diocese. Many of you contributed to the Jerusalem Princess Basma Centre, which is one of their ministries. Find out about and support the [Canadian Companions of Jerusalem](#) if you are able.

I am very excited to welcome the Rev. Canon Dr. Judy Paulsen to be our speaker at this online Synod and to teach us more about being people who are comfortable inviting others into a conversation about faith. I want to express my thanks to the Synod Planning Committee for their faithful work planning what I believe will be a stimulating and meaningful Conference Synod.

Last year, Synod passed a motion to work on dismantling Anti-Black Racism in

the Diocese of Montreal. A task force was struck soon after and I am so very grateful for their hard work. Tomorrow you will hear more about what's being planned. All of us in the diocese are asked to take on the work of education and increased awareness of sub-conscious and conscious attitudes and behaviours that undermine racial justice and equity in our society. I hold up the vision of the Kingdom of God from the book of Revelation where a great multiracial gathering worships the Lamb:

After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" (*Rev. 7: 9-10 ESV*)

We launched a web site in French, and we are also working to try to connect with fellow Anglicans from the rest of the world who aren't necessarily "like us" even though they too are Anglicans! I am aware that Anglican expressions and contexts vary around the world. As we welcome newcomers to our diocese, we must be prepared to learn what differences they bring, and to value them.

I'm grateful to our Partnerships Committee for their work in helping with our formal partnerships with companion dioceses. Because of their insistence that I attend the school for new bishops in Canterbury in 2017, I have bishop friends in other dioceses around the world. Bishop Michael Herenz in North India came to mind recently and I wrote to ask how he was in the midst of this pandemic. He asks for our prayers as they live with the rampant outbreak of the virus there and with systemic troubles in their country.

The Partnership Committee has been planning to sponsor a priest to study at the Diocesan College and earn a Bachelor of Theology. Bishop James Almasi has named the Rev. Linus Buriani as the one he would like to send. Linus is known to several of us as he accompanied us on our last trip to Tanzania in 2018. The current plan is that Linus will arrive in time to begin studies at McGill this fall.

The Bishop's Action Appeal was a wonderful success last year. Thank you to all who so generously contributed to the Local Missions Fund, The Jerusalem Princess Basma Hospital and to Giving With Grace, the new name for the Anglican Appeal. We received over \$33,000. Thank you so much!! It is my intention to invite this year's donations to the Bishop's Action Appeal to help fund Fr. Linus Buriani's time here. The committee is also soliciting funding from

parishes and looking for other available grants. Fr. Linus will return to Masasi to teach there in their seminary.

These are ways that we are investing in the future of the church. We have not just been sitting and worrying and wringing our hands as a diocese. We need to be thinking and praying about the future of the church and not just worrying about the needs of today.

Here is another example of what I believe was Spirit-led initiative. In a significant change from past practices, and in response to opportunities made available during the pandemic, the Diocesan Council voted to continue to suspend charging diocesan assessments so as to enable congregations to benefit from the government wage subsidy. This has given you more time to breathe and to plan. Because of this action, and because of continued faithful givings by our members, over two-thirds of our congregations were able to maintain their level of savings or increase them.

It needs to be noted however, that it has also cost our diocesan investments over \$1 million last year, and has the potential to do the same this year.

That kind of draw on our holdings has a serious impact on our investment income and puts some of our common ministries in danger. For the past five years of my time as Bishop, our leadership team has worked very hard to reduce our deficit spending. Programs like curacies, additional supports to parishes, chaplaincies and synod staff support are all affected by deficits. If we continue in this direction, cashing in our legacies, we may be endangering the future of the church in favour of avoiding tough decisions. I am grateful, however, that past generosity and past wealth gave us the cushion we needed to react in this way during this extraordinary time and I invite you to consider leaving a legacy to the Diocese of Montreal.

I am concerned about our opportunities for ministry and for the talented young people who are training for ordination and who take up ministry as others retire. Their horizons are vastly different from the predictable ones when I was starting out in 1981. It is my firm belief that God is leading this church and that there is a future for it. Our time together since the pandemic was declared has taught us that the Church of Christ is alive and adaptable – even if we hate and often resist change! We can decide to stay cautious and eat up our investments or we can pray for courage to take up God's call to be salt and light where God has put us, to work and pray together, to be contagious and viral Christians who live

joyfully and generously in God's presence and share that with others. During these ten days of *Thy Kingdom Come*, please pray for the Kingdom of God to come in your hearts and in your homes and communities and consider where God may be showing you opportunities for ministry that need your generous support.

We know that God has not been in self-quarantine and has continued to inspire growth and innovation throughout the Diocese. By going online, the small and dispersed congregations of the Eastern Townships are experiencing a new sense of vitality, shared ministry, and hope after years of slow decline. Zoom is being used for Bible Study, fellowship groups, Education for Ministry, and for Sunday worship, where attendance is often 90 plus...compared to less than a dozen in each of the churches before the pandemic. I pray that this growth continues into the future and I am pleased that the clergy and lay leaders there will be actively discerning a new pilot project for shared ministry and pastoral care in the region.

Around the diocese, groups meet online to pray the daily offices, to learn together and to encourage one another. I know that we miss meeting together face to face, but God has been using this time of pruning to force us to grow and become more fruitful. People have been able to join who would not have crossed the threshold of a church, and people's faith has been flourishing. YouTube, Facebook, Instagram and TikTok have all been harnessed in the work of sharing the gospel and making disciples.

One of our realities is that some congregations have not returned to their buildings at all yet. Some of them have concluded that they can't manage and don't need those particular buildings. When horse and buggy determined reasonable distances to travel to church, having a church in every village or neighbourhood was desirable. For a long time, the financial and human resource demands have been too much for the smaller congregations and now some have made the decision to sell their buildings. I know that many people grieve the loss of these beloved places. On the other hand, we hope that these sales will help build a stronger future for funding ministry and mission in the area and that people will enjoy the fellowship of meeting together in larger numbers online and in person.

This is the Ascension Day charge from Jesus: make disciples of all nations, invite people in, talk to them, pray for them, love them with Christ's love. Pray for God's power to work in you and them. Want it! Look for it! Be ready to fail

sometimes while trying to co-operate with God. Don't stop changing and don't try to go back to where you once felt safe. Ask God to use you each day. Be open to surprising ways. Be open to those who may need grace or hope. Be expectant. Pray always. Let God's power fill you and direct you. And Jesus will always be with you.

As we think about what our Diocese may look like after the pandemic, we need to be praying for God's will in all of this. What kind of church does God want us to be? We need to prepare ourselves for the time when we do reopen fully, so that we are not caught off guard. What important ministries have been shelved during this pandemic? I invite you to think and pray as congregations about how your ministry will be expressed. What will you keep, what will you let go of, what will you do differently and what will you find new courage to try?

Let me remind you that the early church spent a lot of time together praying and worshipping and sharing with one another. We cannot simply decide to minister as lone rangers and prayer is a key component in any Christian venture.

In closing, I want to congratulate the Rev. Jennifer Bourque who has recently been named the Professional Coordinator of Spiritual Care for the CIUSSS de l'Ouest de l'île de Montreal. In her new capacity, Jen will function across the various hospitals and CHSLDs in the West Island.

The Rev. Dr. Karen Egan has indicated her desire to retire as Incumbent of St. George's, Place du Canada as of August 1st. I am grateful to Karen for her ministry. I am hoping that she will continue in the strength of our Diocese and continue with her valued contributions to the national church.

I want to thank all those who pray for me and help me in this ministry as your bishop. Together we are a Diocese and I am grateful to each of you for your contribution.

Thank you to all the staff, clergy and lay who serve in our diocese. And, thank you to the amazing and dedicated members of the Diocese who volunteer in so many capacities: on Diocesan Council; at Synod and the planning and sub-committees; on Standing Committees and PWRDF; as Lay Readers, EFM (Education For Ministry) mentors, REVIVE leaders, Spiritual Directors; at Mile End Mission, Tyndale St George's, Action Réfugiés, St. Michael's Mission, Innovation Assistance, and Stewardship of the Environment; as wardens and synod delegates and in so many ways in the parishes. This is intense and

challenging work for our leaders. Please pray for them and ask God to bless and uphold them.

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.” *Jeremiah 29: 11-13 NIV*