

1 BISHOP'S CHARGE - SYNOD 2001  
2 BUILDING STRONGER PARISHES AND EQUIPPING GOD'S PEOPLE FOR HIS WORK IN  
3 THE DIOCESE

4 I want to begin this Charge with a profound expression of gratitude to all of you who  
5 have been in the front line in the work of God in the diocese during the past year. I am  
6 especially grateful for those who work in our Synod office, Doreen Smith, Phyllis Cathcart,  
7 Canon Fred Scott, and Archdeacon Claude Miller, for their efforts in coordinating the work of  
8 the diocese and maintaining this network of mission and ministry that unites our efforts as a  
9 diocese. As well, I am very grateful to the Territorial Archdeacons and Regional Deans, who, on  
10 the local level have supported congregations in their efforts to be the Church in their  
11 communities. But chiefly I am grateful to those who lead the Church at the local level. To our  
12 Clergy, Church Wardens, Layreaders and others who provide faithfully for divine worship,  
13 spiritual growth, fellowship, in providing outreach to their communities. As I have suggested  
14 before, "the local parish is the engine of Mission." So God bless you for all your efforts.

15 Last year at Synod 2000 I presented to you four areas of ministry that we all felt strongly  
16 needed our attention. They included: (1) a new emphasis on ministry to younger generations of  
17 the Church; (2) innovative programmes of education and spiritual growth to believers of all ages,  
18 (3) a fresh look at communications between the diocese and parishes, and (4) a new look at  
19 steward-ship and financial development.

20 As a result of your discussions and recommendations at Synod 2000 a Synod Action  
21 Committee was struck to implement our recommendations. After eight months that committee  
22 has reported their progress through their Chair Person, Peter Irish. Much of their efforts I  
23 reported to you through the video presentation earlier this year. I must offer much gratitude to  
24 Mr. Irish, the Rev. Geoffrey Hall, and other members of the committee who worked very hard  
25 throughout this past year.

26 Again may I review the progress we have made. First, in the area of leadership  
27 development I am happy to report the Clergy College, set for June 18-23, is ready to go with a  
28 high proportion of our clergy expected to attend. As well, last weekend a delegation of three  
29 from this diocese attended a lay development resource weekend in London, Ontario. Three  
30 people who are committed to work at organizing such an event in our diocese for June 2002.

31 In the area of youth development, plans are in place for a weekend event in Saint John,  
32 October 25-28. Information on this will soon be available for parish leaders. It is hoped that we  
33 can encourage many of our young people to attend.

34 As well, I am encouraged by the efforts at the parish level to employ youth ministers to  
35 hold youth services, and to generally be more sensitive to the spiritual needs of young people.

36 In the area of communications, new work continues on our diocesan web site, and the  
37 appointment of a site editor to maintain the site with current and up-to-date information.

38 We, the Church of Christ, in this first year of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century find ourselves in a very  
39 strange and challenging place. Old Testament Scholar Walter Brueggeman, whom I enjoy  
40 reading very much, tells the story of visiting Boston College a year or so ago, and being walked  
41 through one of their new buildings. It was a new Economics building, state of the art, ultra-  
42 modern facility. Just inside the front door was a big beautifully carved wooden chair; on of

43 those chairs that nobody sits in, and on its back a Latin motto in bold print. After the tour of this  
 44 new world place, as Bruegemaan and his priest guide were walking by the chair again, he paused  
 45 and confessing his weakness with Latin, asked his Catholic trained host what it meant. He  
 46 smiled, well he said roughly translated it means “Toto we’re not in Kansas anymore”.

47 For those of you who have lived a few years and who have been close to the life of the  
 48 Church, we know all too well we are not where we used to be. Like Dorothy, we are not at home  
 49 anymore. We live in a new and very different reality. It seems to me that over the last thirty  
 50 years we have been going through a radical and painful separation from our culture. For decades  
 51 some say certainly for centuries mainline churches have enjoyed a rather cushy marriage with  
 52 the ruling and cultural elite of our society. Sunday morning was observed by that culture for  
 53 worship, quiet and rest. Ninety per cent of the population were at least adherent to that  
 54 proposition; most people were on some church list. But by 1950 a new generation of Canadians  
 55 was being born that would change all that. Eighty per cent of whom would come to see the  
 56 institutional church as a relic of an oppressive past, and irrelevant to their needs. And Sunday  
 57 morning lost its exclusive hold on our culture affections. In New Brunswick it is twenty-seven  
 58 per cent of our population who is in church every Sunday, and that is the highest of any Province  
 59 of Canada. “Toto we’re not in Kansas anymore”.

60 Walter Bruegemaan goes on to suggest that we the Church have gone into exile. That  
 61 like God’s people in the sixth century BC we have lost our temple, and find ourselves in a  
 62 strange and alien culture. To quote Bruegemaan “we live in an exilic culture that diminishes,  
 63 disregards, and derides our identity. As Jews disappeared into the woodwork of Babylon, so  
 64 Christians now, as never before, disappear into the hegemony of secularism.”

65 I find myself attracted to Bruegemaan’s analysis of our present situation because it not  
 66 only accounts for our loss and disconnection over the past number of decades, but also gives a  
 67 hope for the future. Yes we don’t have the temple of Christendom anymore; yes we are losing  
 68 people to the hegemony of secularism, but God has not abandoned us, and He can use this period  
 69 of exile for our good. As God said it through Jeremiah “for my plans for you are not for your  
 70 destruction, but for your good to give you a future and a hope”. Exile means that we’re not in  
 71 Kansas anymore; we’re not at home anymore, but I take heart in the Epistle to the Hebrews  
 72 ascribing the giants of the faith “they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth;  
 73 people who say such things show that they are looking for a country; not the country they have  
 74 left, but instead longing for a better country, a heavenly one”. And so as we pursue ministry in  
 75 these exilic and exciting times; what is it exactly that God is calling us to do specifically for our  
 76 diocese? I suggest four areas of great need.

### 77 ***1. CONCERN FOR YOUTH***

78 It is clear that a concern for youth in the Church continues to be a high priority. In order  
 79 to move forward on this serious need I propose a fall consultation on youth, involving all those  
 80 participating in youth work throughout the diocese. The purpose of this would be to plan a long-  
 81 term strategy for youth in the diocese. It is clear from discussions in the last year that there are  
 82 no easy, quick solutions here, and that only a coordinated and planned process will have any  
 83 success. God is clearly leading us in this area, and I believe it will mean a major new investment  
 84 in our camp facilities, as well as new positions of leadership for youth in the diocese.

85 As well as what the diocese can initiate I also propose that parish leadership put the issue

86 of youth on the agenda of their vestries to both explore ways of including young people in  
87 Sunday worship, as well as resourcing, where possible, youth ministry. As well as this, I charge  
88 parishes to explore ways of cooperating with neighbouring parishes, on a local or deanery level,  
89 by providing regular youth services, perhaps monthly or bi-monthly, as well as exploring the  
90 possibility of several parishes employing a youth minister together.

## 91 **2. Lay Education and Spiritual Growth**

92 The second proposal I make to you, under the umbrella of building stronger parishes, is  
93 in the area of lay education and spiritual growth. It is clear that a strong Church means a more  
94 informed, equipped, biblically literate laity. I am grateful for the blessing that Cursillo and  
95 Alpha and other spiritual programmes have been to our people. I am also grateful for the  
96 ministry of the Rev. Patricia Drummond in her effort to support and encourage our Sunday  
97 School teachers. As well, I look forward to the new lay leadership development weekend  
98 planned for next year. This event will be both inspirational and instructive as we seek to  
99 develop and support lay ministry at the local level.

100 To this end I propose that the diocese develop a library of “faith-building resources”,  
101 including video programmes, curriculums, Bible Study resource material designed for lay  
102 education to be used at the parish or deanery level. This would make available to the clergy  
103 much needed support in their efforts to provide programmes of spiritual growth to their people.

104 As well, I propose to each parish or deanery that they endeavour to set aside two terms of  
105 faith-development education each year, one in the fall and the other in Lent, once appropriate  
106 resources are available. I realize that many parishes do this now, but I would love to see this  
107 expanded. This may mean the appointment of an education or spiritual growth committee in  
108 each parish to assist the rector in these endeavours.

## 109 **3. Stewardship and Financial Development**

110 The third area of continuing concern is the difficulty surrounding the issues of  
111 stewardship and financial development. It is clear, that if parishes are to continue to meet the  
112 continuing and rising costs of leadership, building maintenance, as well as faith development  
113 and parish outreach, we will need support and know-how in how to challenge our people to their  
114 commitment to the support of this work. As well, if the diocese is to provide education  
115 resources for youth and adult programming, as well as major investment in our camp facilities,  
116 this will need a new plan for financial support.

117 To this end I propose two things. First that a major stewardship conference be held this  
118 November, gathering representatives from each parish to begin the process of stewardship  
119 education. Secondly, I propose that the diocese consider seriously the appointment of a Parish  
120 Development Officer to provide stewardship education at the deanery and parish level. I  
121 propose that this appointment be for a two to three year contract term. Other dioceses across  
122 Canada that have made such an appointment speak of the benefits of such an appointment, and  
123 although positive results are only seen in the long term the work has to begin before it grows.

124 As well as these proposals I announce a series of budget meetings to be held this  
125 September on an archdeaconry level, to give lay delegates, church wardens and clergy, an  
126 opportunity to examine and to have input into the budget proposals for 2002. This will give  
127 grass roots input to the budget before it goes to the Board of Finance and Diocesan Council for  
128 final ratification later in the fall.

129 I propose to each parish that they commit themselves to be involved in this process, and  
130 that they send at least one delegate, along with their rector, to the stewardship conference in  
131 November, and that if, and when, a parish development officer be appointed they will take  
132 advantage of that ministry

#### 133 ***4. Parishes Struggling to Survive***

134 The fourth area highlighted in your response, and an area which I am deeply concerned  
135 with, is the whole area of parishes who presently struggle to survive, and whose leadership of  
136 both clergy and laity are seeking some relief from the care of aging and costly buildings, as well  
137 as increased leadership costs, and are doing this with diminishing resources, and diminishing  
138 membership.

139 In response to this serious need on the part of some of our parishes I am proposing a  
140 programme of new partnerships for ministry. We are happy to report that throughout the last  
141 two years we have succeeded in building stronger parishes by realigning congregations in such a  
142 way as to make them viable and self-supporting, by building new partnerships. Examples of this  
143 include the Parish of Richmond and Houlton, Maine. The Parish of Hillsborough & Riverside  
144 and St. Andrews, Moncton. As well as this the Parishes of Westmorland and Kent, Cambridge  
145 & Waterborough and Campobello are now served by clergy on a part-time basis, reducing their  
146 financial pressures, and encouraging lay ministry from within the parish.

147 Discussions are continuing in other parts of the diocese where parishes can no longer go  
148 it alone, and seeking new partnerships with neighbouring parishes in the hope of building  
149 stronger centres for mission and ministry, and insuring the long-term presence of our Church in  
150 these areas. In some of these situations proposals are being made for the replacement of aging  
151 and non-viable facilities with new churches and halls, so that our ministry to our children and  
152 grandchildren will be possible.

153 The diocese will continue to support and advise any parish, or collection of parishes, who  
154 wish to pursue discussions of this nature. Our policy is not to close churches, but to rather  
155 ensure that a viable strong Anglican presence is maintained and strengthened for every area of  
156 our diocese. We believe that in many cases this can be accomplished through new creative  
157 partnerships for ministry.

158 During your discussions tomorrow morning I urge you to consider these four areas of  
159 concern, under the general heading of Building Stronger Parishes throughout our diocese. This  
160 will only be accomplished through much prayer and seeking God's grace and guidance. "Unless  
161 the Lord build the house our labour is in vain that build it."

162 A copy of this Charge will be made available to each of you after the service, and I ask  
163 that you read it prayerfully in preparation for your discussions tomorrow morning.

164 May God bless us as we seek to build His house together.

165 In Christ,  
166 +William