RESPONSE TO BISHOP HOCKIN'S CHARGE 2001

to the 123rd Session of the Diocesan Synod of Fredericton
Delivered by Mr. Bill Gerhardt and Archdeacon Stuart Allan, co-chairs of the Response Committee on the Bishop's Charge
at The University of New Brunswick, Fredericton, NB, on June 9, 2001

Twelve months ago Bishop Hockin delivered his first charge to the people of this Diocese. At that time our Bishop launched us on a journey in which, as he outlined on Thursday night, has resulted in an upcoming clergy education event; an upcoming lay resource weekend program; a weekend youth event this coming fall, an enhanced communications network eventually providing regular e-mail computer generated newsletters from the Diocese to every parish and through the Diocesan web site; Episcopal week long visitations to every part of the Diocese; and prayers cards to every parish home.

At this synod the Bishop also reminded us "Toto, we are not in Kansas any more." The Christian Church is now situated in a different place, in a different time and in a different cultural milieu. And while we all have had the doubts, I am sure, at one time or another of the lion, the scarecrow or the tinman, and we all must feel we may have been led down some yellow brick road only to find that the great promise of Oz was a fraud and disappointment, still, the way back to Kansas, it turned out, was actually within reach all along.

On Friday morning these delegates clearly demonstrated that we do have the brain, heart, and courage, and even the belief of Dorothy. The gospel tells us similar gifts were given at Pentecost, and the faith in the work of the church is ours to have only for the believing, asking and the using.

In response to the Bishop's video, members of the Diocese affirmed four ways to help we the Church be faithful during the exile: 1) deliberate and focussed attention to youth ministry; 2) lay education and spiritual growth 3) stewardship and financial development and finally 4) renewing struggling parishes. Our Bishop has challenged us with a way forward and now this is our response his charge.

In processing your responses we have used almost the same approach as last year. In your table groupings you had the opportunity to discuss and record your comments on our Bishop's Charge.

To ensure that the Response to the Charge Committee truly heard what you said, we introduced two additional safeguards:

1. **The plenary session, where you shared with other groups and decided on the significant information that you wanted to be put forward. This process allowed for the <u>key ideas</u> that came out of your groups to be included in this paper.**

2. A final meeting was held this morning with the lead facilitators and the synod planning group to make sure that all of your responses were reflected in this document.

Overview:

Responding to our Bishop's charge, members of Synod expressed real appreciation for the consultative process which is being employed. There is widespread appreciation for the continuity that is evident between last year's charge and this year's. Comments like, "We are steady on course" underlined this observation. We appreciate the Bishop's willingness to name 'problems' and then to direct our attention and energies to addressing the same. Synod members expressed appreciation for our Bishop's consultative /active leadership style and pray that this will continue.

CONCERN FOR YOUTH

Diocesan Level:

Participants in this forum, in discussing Diocesan level youth ministry, pointed out that it is evident that the culture provides many competing claims upon our youth. We need to be deliberate and focussed in our approach to youth ministry. There is widespread support for the proposed fall consultation for the purpose of developing a long-term strategy for youth. We encourage the Bishop to make this consultation a broadly based process.

We support the proposed initiative of major new investment in our camp facilities. We also encourage this investment in camping to include expanded bursary assistance to allow more children and youth to participate. There is very substantial support for the Bishop's suggestion that we consider new positions of leadership for youth. Most of us believe that the Diocese needs to engage key leaders in youth work who have gifts and skills that are transferrable. We need people with the ability to teach local leaders.

Parish Level:

We appreciated our Bishop's emphasis upon <u>Parishes</u> including and resourcing youth ministry. There is recognition that youth are in many ways not yet treated as full members of the Body of Christ. We need to take every opportunity to fully involve youth in every aspect of parish worship, life, and leadership. We are convinced that effective youth ministry must include an educational and faith development component. We are encouraged by the Bishop's words about local or deanery sharing in youth ministry. We agree that this sharing at a deanery or local level provides a practical way forward both in shared youth services and in providing and funding staff resources for youth ministry.

LAY EDUCATION AND SPIRITUAL GROWTH

Overview:

The overall response to the charge in the area of Lay Education and Spiritual Growth was very positive with appreciation for the continuity with the last charge. The participants agreed that the problems were challenging and needed to be addressed. There was overwhelming support for the Bishop's proposals and they wanted the Diocese to get on with it. The participants appreciated the Bishop taking accountability and having the chance to study and respond to the charge. There was concern that others both be given responsibility and take responsibility.

The participants believed that Lay Education and Spiritual Growth are the most important issues facing the Church and undergird everything we do. We cannot disciple our youth, for example, without adult members receiving training and resources. We need a full range of programs that encompass all church members. Outreach was not specifically mentioned in the charge, but it was felt this would be a consequence of spiritual growth. This also relates to the whole question of motivating persons to be involved in education for spiritual growth.

One thing clear from this discussion is the conviction among many of the participants of the need for deaneries to play a greater part in the development and conducting of educational and training programs, assisting parishes and perhaps enabling activities that would otherwise not be possible.

Diocesan Level:

There was overwhelming support for what the Bishop is asking the Diocese to do regarding Lay Education and Spiritual Growth. Participants were strongly committed to an effective resource centre, and the funds to put it together and communicate to the Parishes what we have. It is recommended we have a deanery resource person to work along with the Diocese. The resource centre needs to contain a catalogue of materials and resource people available in the Diocese, including a description of the materials that have been received from the National Resource Library. Concerns focussed around issues of how good the resources are, and what use can be made of them. We need to develop an assessment process and provide feedback on what works well and what doesn't, along with the details of the programs.

One strong recommendation is for the development of an interactive web-based solution to Diocesan communication. It was suggested the Diocese develop an Intranet and all Parishes have a computer. Some specific suggestions were deanery level meetings for study and information exchange, encourage daily Bible

readings and more biblically based programs. Another suggestion is adult mentors for lay leadership development. It was stated that education must continue to be a priority. Also, do not be afraid to be interdenominational and share resources.

It was pointed out that it is important to have a personal relationship with Jesus, and faith development programmes for vestries to discern the will of the Lord for their Parish. When we undertake something for Christ, it is important to do it well, so rather than taking on a lot of activities, it would be better to do one thing well.

Deanery / Parish Level:

Lay leaders should be biblically trained before taking office in the Parish, and financial support be made available to help this happen. Clergy need to be encouraged to share ministry with laity. To experience the power of prayer and the blessing of tithing, parishes must enhance parish prayer life. Also, there needs to be role clarification for clergy and laity for prayer and mutual support. There needs to be more support for existing organizations and programs such as Mothers Union, Cursillo, etc..

Suggestions include collaboration among parishes within Deaneries bringing lay people as well as clergy together regularly at Deanery level. Fall and winter programs could be the responsibility of parishes and deaneries, but it was suggested the Bishop provide a Lenten program on Video.

We need teachers teaching the deeper life in Christ. Faith building must be biblically based. Two studies, fall and Lent, need to be the minimum. We need to reestablish our commitment to lay reader training. Deaneries must take responsibility for parishes that have difficulties in coordinating teaching or conducting training.

While agreeing that lay education and spiritual growth merit serious attention at the parish level, it was suggested the mandate could be part of existing parish committees. Parishes that may be unable to afford to participate in educational programs, or where distances are a problem, are another concern.

STEWARDSHIP AND FINANCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Overview:

There is a recognition that stewardship is an issue at both the Parish and Diocesan Level. These groups also stated that they wanted to "get on with it". At the same time, there are concerns and

reservations. The first has to do with the financial burden that the Bishop's proposed initiatives will place on the parishes. As well, delegates want to ensure that whatever happens at the Diocesan level is reflective of what the parishes want and need. There is support for our Bishop's vision of stewardship. However, we must proceed carefully.

There is an expectation that any stewardship program would be biblically based, and focussed on the need for commitment of our time and talent as well as our treasure. As one group put it, "Let's not put the financial cart before the spiritual horse". Another group said "If we feed the local flock in their needs, we will grow, and stewardship will flow." Finally, it goes without saying that all of our stewardship efforts must be Christ-centred, not money-centred.

With respect to the Role of Diocese and Bishop:

In his charge, the Bishop identified three things:

1. **a series of budget consultation meetings in the fall;**
2. **the Diocesan Stewardship Conference in November;**
3. **the employment of a Parish Development Officer.**

There is general support for the Stewardship Conference. There is a feeling that the whole process must be cost effective, and one group suggested having regional conferences rather than one large provincial conference. Ideally, parishes would like to send delegates at no cost to themselves to a one day session held on a weekend.

The concept proposed by the Bishop of hiring a parish development officer generated much discussion. This is a very sensitive issue. Discussion group members are concerned about such things as the cost of this position, the qualifications and parish input prior to the hiring process. There seems to be a consensus that the person hired be a lay person from New Brunswick with a strong spiritual orientation and a knowledge of the Diocese.

There was support for the proposed budget meetings. As one group put it "this will give a sense of ownership back to vestries, parishes and individuals. We will have a stake in the budget and a better understanding of the process."

Role of the Parishes:

The issue of stewardship is a challenge for every single parish in the Diocese. As one group said "Parishes need to take ownership in the stewardship of the Diocese - through active participation in the stewardship conference and the budget meetings planned for this fall. Participation should be a delegation of at least four individuals including wardens and treasurers." Another group mentioned the importance of lay leadership in this area - "Involvement of local laity - not just clergy - is especially important for continuity." One final quote by a group stated "Parishes need to recognize the importance of stewardship education, be willing to move forward, take chances and find new ways to look at stewardship and financial development."

STRUGGLING PARISHES GROUPINGS

Overview:

Delegates are very encouraged that this issue is being recognized and discussed by Synod. It is a problem across the whole diocese, and there is a recognition that we are indeed our brother's keeper. If one parish struggles, we all struggle. This is not just a parish problem – it is a shared problem.

Some expressed a concern that our struggling parishes are only symptomatic of a larger issue. We need to collectively focus more energy on evangelism and outreach so that our parishes grow in strength and in numbers. As one group commented, "Closing buildings is a 'rear guard' action and does not address the larger issue."

It goes without saying that solutions to the issues of struggling parishes are sometimes painful ones. We all need to be aware that there are no simple solutions and we need to continually remind ourselves that "the church is people, not buildings". At the same time we must not only rearrange our buildings, we must change our attitudes. Our people struggled with the question of Episcopal leadership on this issue. It is felt that the Bishop has a responsibility to continue to exercise strong consultative leadership and communication with the parishes involved.

One group stated, "We want the Bishop to share what's on his heart on this issue. We think he has much more to say." Another group said, "The Bishop did not go far enough." Still another said, "We are uncomfortable with the idea of the Bishop pushing. If we're pushed we tend to resist but if we're led we tend to follow."

Role of Bishop and Diocese:

Some specific suggestions made by the discussion groups regarding the role of the Diocese and Bishop were:

1) **the Diocese establish standards to determine the viability of a parish – a kind of liability – viability analysis tool.**
2) **the Diocese be pro-active in bringing parishes together to share so that struggling parishes can benefit from outside resources.**
3) **the Bishop flesh out what he means by the term "partnerships." Members of Synod would like more information, more examples and models that work.**
4) **the Diocese take a lead in training lay leaders to assume greater responsibility in a new models of ministry.**
5) **the Bishop be intentional in his placement of clergy so that those with gifts in the area of parish growth and renewal are placed where they are most needed.**

Role of Parishes:

There is a sense that parishes need to understand the value and importance of sacrifice, to think beyond themselves and to take the risks required for change. Fear often accompanies risk, but there is much to be gained by working through our fear. During times of change and uncertainty, education and information is crucial. Part of this education is becoming aware of other parish's struggles and of the reality that "united we stand, divided we fall." The sharing of our successes and failures should be a resource of support and learning and we need to be open about identifying parishes that we consider to be "struggling." To do so is not a negative thing. Parishes need to be willing to accept the challenge of reassessing themselves, starting with the question "Why are we here? … What unique contribution do we make in this community?"

Specific comments on the role of the parishes were:

1) Trust between clergy of neighbouring parishes, between the parishes themselves and between clergy and laity is still an issue and needs attention.

2) Buildings are not the Church, people are. Travelling a few more kilometres to attend church should not be an issue in this day and age.

3) A renewed emphasis on the place of lay ministry (the ministry of the baptized) might assist in relieving some of the pressures in struggling parishes.

4) Improved communication within and between parishes might encourage more "partnerships" and working together. More combined parish or multi-parish events would promote a wider sense of community.

THIS IS YOUR RESPONSE TO THE BISHOP'S CHARGE.

In conclusion Bishop Hockin, there is clearly very strong support for your understanding of the wishes of the people of this Diocese. Your continued strong, consultative and active leadership style are deeply valued by your people. The charge response process and continuity with the vision presented at your first synod are hallmarks of the anticipation and support for the exciting, yet challenging future of the Diocese.

Bishop, in quoting psalm 127, you remind us that, in the end, this will not succeed unless

" The Lord build the house" - otherwise "our labour will be in vain."

AMEN.