

Archbishop's Pastoral Letter to Vestries, 2014

to be read or circulated on the Sunday of the parish's annual vestry meeting



Diocese of Toronto
Anglican Church of Canada

To the Clergy, Churchwardens and Parishioners
My Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Grace and peace in the name of the Triune God: Omnipotent, Incarnate, and Indwelling Intercessor.

As you gather for your annual vestry meeting, the College of Bishops gives heartfelt thanks for your faithfulness in worship, work and witness to the Christian faith as members of the Anglican Church.

The mission of the Diocese of Toronto calls us “to worship God and proclaim Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit and to embody – in word and action – God’s reconciling love, justice, compassion and liberation, through which knowledge of God’s reign is extended.” A publication from the Anglican Communion called “*The Anglican Way: Signposts on a Common Journey*” notes that Anglicans are formed by scripture, shaped by worship, ordered for communion, and directed to God’s mission.

Here in the Diocese of Toronto, we seek to serve that mission through **Compassionate Service, Intelligent Faith, and Godly Worship.**

All that we do should enable us, as a diocese, and as parishes and other ministries within the diocese, to be missionally focused – increasing our capacity to respond as vibrant partners of God’s activity in the world as identified in the Marks of Mission:

- To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom
- To teach, baptize, and nurture new believers
- To respond to human need by loving service
- To seek to transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind, and to pursue peace and reconciliation
- To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth

I see this as continuing our work of building communities of hope and compassion through investment in building healthy parishes, with strong leadership, appropriate infrastructure and responsive engagement with the neighbourhood.

In our tradition, the diocese and the parish are in an essential partnership, neither sufficient without the other. The parish has particular responsibility for a specific ministry within a defined geographic area of the diocese, with the diocese responsible for the overall mission strategy and allocation of the resources of the whole church for the provision of ministry of word and sacrament, pastoral care, and evangelism within the whole diocese. Each parish shares in the ministry of their "siblings" and is inextricably invested in the welfare of the whole family.

The ministry of the Bishop is an essential aspect of Anglican expression of church. Bishops have a multi-faceted role: proclamation of the faith through teaching, including preaching and by example; making provision for pastoral care and the sacramental life of the church; governance, strategic planning and

oversight of the mission of the church within the diocese; defense of the vulnerable in society; and participation in the leadership of the whole church. (*Ordination of a Bishop, BAS, pp. 636f.*)

Priests and Deacons also are called to exercise this ministry under the authority of their bishop, and to engage in God's mission in the world, "to make Christ and his redemptive love known," "to love and serve the people among whom [they] work," and "to interpret to the Church the needs, concerns and hopes of the world." (Ordination Rites, BAS, pp. 646, 655.) All of us who are baptized Christians have promised to "proclaim by word and example the good news of God in Christ", and "to seek and serve Christ in all persons" (Holy Baptism, BAS, pp. 159 f.)

We all have a role to play in God's mission to the world. I said in my Charge to Diocesan Synod in November that my vision is that every parish will be Mission-Shaped. My expectation is that every congregation will be looking for new opportunities to engage in God's mission to the community in every area. There is work to be done, and we are the workers. In this New Year, I ask you to consider how God is calling you to exercise your gifts for the building up of the Kingdom and the furtherance of God's mission.

On New Year's Day I presented the inaugural awards for "The Order of the Diocese of Toronto" at St James' Cathedral in recognition of outstanding lay ministry in our Church. It was a marvelous occasion when these first 48 individuals receive recognition for their years of faithful witness and service in their parishes. As I said in my sermon, they are not super heroes but ordinary Anglican "folk who by everyday acts of love and kindness keep the darkness at bay." We have many saints among us, who are quietly carrying out God's mission in their tasks, duties and joys, and act as models for us to emulate.

You too are engaged in the work of mission! Those of us who have been gifted with children and grandchildren are evangelists to budding believers, encouraging difficult questions and nurturing intelligent faith. Our volunteer hours and stewardship of time and talent all contribute to the building up of God's Reign. Looking farther afield, with whom can you share the good news and hope that you have found in Christ Jesus? Your friends, colleagues, associates? Research has shown, and our own experience has been, that people are searching to fill that "God-shaped hole" that each of us carries around.

I want to thank especially the churchwardens and the lay leaders of your parish, as well as the clergy, for their incredible gift of their time and energy this past year for the ongoing life of the church. We could not function without them. We welcome those who are beginning or continuing in office this year.

Together with the College of Bishops, I wish each of you every blessing for the year of our Lord that lies before us.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "+ Colin R. Johnson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

The Most Rev'd Colin R. Johnson
Archbishop of Toronto