

Archbishop's Pastoral Letter to Vestries, 2017

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

To the Clergy, Churchwardens and Parishioners

My Sisters and Brothers in Christ,



Diocese of Toronto
Anglican Church of Canada

Grace and peace in the name of our Saviour Jesus Christ.

What a privilege it is to serve you as the Bishop of this wonderful Diocese and to represent you in the wider councils of the Church in Canada and across our Communion. We have been truly blessed in the breadth of the gifts God has given us in the resources of peoples who have come from every part of the globe, in the physical resources we have inherited, and in the rich diversity of our spiritual life all rooted in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

There have been many significant changes in this past year. Three of our Area Bishops have moved or retired. All of them began their ordained ministry in Toronto and have served our Church with great faithfulness, gracious wisdom and effective leadership. I am immensely grateful to Bishops Linda Nicholls, Philip Poole and Patrick Yu for their service.

In September, Synod met to elect three priests of this Diocese to be Bishops in the Church of God. They have now been ordained and consecrated, and have begun their episcopal ministries in their assigned areas. Joining Bishop Fenty and me, they bring new energy, their own specific gifts, and their deep commitment to the Anglican expression of the Christian Faith that will be a blessing to our Church for years to come.

Bishops, even though they are formed in a particular spiritual and theological tradition, do not serve a special-interest party; they are bishops of, and for, the whole church. The Area Bishops have particular oversight under my direction for a region of the Diocese but they are also Suffragan Bishops and so have concern and responsibility for the whole as well as the parts. They have concern for all of the people of God - and who isn't a child of God? - who live within the boundaries of the Diocese, including those who are not part of any Anglican congregation. They link the parts to the whole and the whole to the parts. The new bishops are still in learning mode as they assume the wonderful and onerous responsibilities of the ministry, so your prayers for all of us are deeply appreciated.

We have also adopted a new strategic plan in 2016 that will set the direction for our work over the next five years. ***"Growing in Christ"***, as it is titled, identifies five focus areas for our attention as a Diocese: identifying and raising up leadership both lay and clergy; building a culture of trust; strengthening our stewardship of resources, both people and property; encouraging innovation based on good evidence; and, simplifying our governance structures. This is rooted in our Vision:

"An Anglican community committed to proclaiming and embodying Jesus Christ through compassionate service, intelligent faith and Godly worship."

Our Mission is the work that we as Anglicans in this Diocese are being called to do:

"We build healthy, missional Anglican communities that engage faithfully with the world and share the gospel of Jesus Christ."

This vision and mission continue the ministry that we have undertaken for decades. They can easily apply to parish life as well and inform both what we do and how we engage in it to join in God's work of transforming lives.

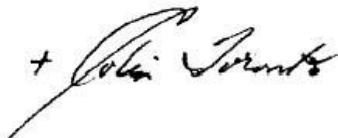
A third change this year continues to affect our life together. General Synod met last July and approved the first step to amend the Marriage Canon to formally permit same-sex marriages in the church. Over the next three years further consultation about this will take place as we prepare for a second reading at General Synod in 2019. As an interim pastoral measure, in a restricted number of parishes where it has been requested after consultation, I have authorized some marriages to be solemnized in certain limited circumstances. Neither parishes nor individual clergy will be required to celebrate marriages contrary to their convictions.

We live in a very diverse Church. That diversity means that we are called to witness to the faith in a variety of ways. Although our witness is rooted in differing interpretations and understanding of Holy Scripture and the tradition, the ways are recognizably Anglican. We are enriched by the breadth of our diversity and would be lessened by the loss of any voice. In the pastoral guidelines for same-sex marriage, you will note that there are strong assurances for a continued, honoured place in all aspects of diocesan life for those who do not agree with this response. I am engaged in a serious and mutually committed consultation with those objecting, to find effective ways that our ministries might flourish together in the highest degree of communion possible. I am also committed to continue the long practice of this Diocese to reflect this authentic diversity in the selection and appointment of clergy, in honoring parish traditions, and in the membership of committees and councils of the diocese. All of us together need to extend to each other the most generous Christian charity that our Redeemer calls us to exercise as we seek to discern and live out God's will.

On this day of the annual Vestry Meeting, I want to express my gratitude to the leadership of your clergy and lay leaders without whom our Church would not flourish. I want to say a special thank you to the Churchwardens, those now completing terms, continuing in office or newly chosen. It is a big responsibility, and you are in my prayers as you take on this trust on behalf of the parish and diocese.

May you be strengthened in all you undertake this year by the riches of Christ's grace and mercy.

Yours faithfully,

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

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