

Diocese-Wide Day of Prayer & Fasting



On June 9, 2018, the Diocese of Toronto will be electing a Coadjutor Bishop who will become the 12th Diocesan Bishop. This will require each member of Synod to discern God's call for the Church. As with all spiritual discernment, this process will involve prayerful listening, reflection, and thoughtfulness.

The Diocese of Toronto is the largest diocese in North America, home to 230 congregations with 54,000 Anglicans, also offering significant leadership both nationally and in the Global Communion. The bishop of Toronto is a central leader in: mission to our neighbours, complex administration, safeguarding the faith, unity and reconciliation, justice and outreach amongst others.

In preparation of this important moment of discernment, on June 1st our diocese will engage a day of Prayer & Fasting, uniting together in shared sacrificial listening for the voice of the Holy Spirit.

There is great blessing and power in unified prayer. Throughout the centuries, God's people have gathered in times of discernment and need, seeking God's will to be known and accomplished. These prayers have often been given focus and clarity through the spiritual discipline of fasting, a voluntary and temporary abstinence (primarily) of food.

Fasting helps in deepening our attentiveness to God and God's will by turning from the desires of the body and towards the life-giving desire of serving and knowing Jesus Christ. In prayerful fasting, we are brought closer to the humble reality of our dependence upon God for all things, drawing from him as the Bread of Life, and are often given a sense of spiritual clarity which further helps hone our prayers and discernment.

"He guides the humble in what is right and teaches the humble his way." (Psalm 25:9)

The Bible speaks in many ways to practices of prayer and fasting in both individual and corporate expressions (e.g. see Exodus 34:28; Nehemiah 1:4; Matthew 4:2, 6:16-18; Mark 2:18; Luke 2:37; Acts 13:2-3, 14:23, 27:9). Jesus engaged prayer and fasting as did his disciples and other followers. Indeed, the Early Fathers and Mothers of the Church modelled and taught prayer and fasting as a universally applied practice for deepening in Christ-likeness.

On June 1st, you might choose to withhold one or two meals, or if you are familiar with the practice, to avoid food throughout the day. It is important to always ensure proper hydration with water. This discipline can also include withholding any contemporary behaviour or practice that represents a significant aspect of one's daily 'diet of life', such as an intake of internet/TV/media. This is especially relevant for those whom restricting food is not medically advisable.

Suggested format for June 1st – A Day of Fasting and Prayer

Included below is a template for how June 1st could be structured either in gathered community with fellow church members, or adjusted for participating alone, whether at home or during free time at work. In any configuration, our shared commitment to pray across the diocese will raise up an encouraging, united voice to Jesus Christ.

Two guiding principles:

1. If necessary, modify the template to suit time constraints. You might choose, for example, to forgo Morning or Evening Prayer, but include two readings of suggested Scripture passages & the Prayer for the Diocese of Toronto's Discernment of a Coadjutor Bishop.
2. What is most important while we fast is that we engage in prayerful, humble listening for the voice of the Holy Spirit, informed by the available information of the candidates and qualifications for episcopal ministry.

Preparing for the Day of Prayer and Fasting

Information on episcopal roles, qualifications, and current nominees are found on the [Upcoming Synod](#) page

Prior to June 1st please engage the following material:

1. The document, [Episcopal Ministry](#), which outlines the responsibilities and gifts needed to exercise the role of bishop of Toronto
2. Short [Q&A videos](#) with Archbishop Johnson, describing the nature and experience of the role of diocesan bishop
3. Written and video content of each episcopal nominee. Questions have been posed to help explore their unique experience, values, and hopes

Gather Welcome and Introductions

30 minutes Morning or Evening Prayer from the Book of Alternative Services or the Book of Common Prayer. A selection of optional passages for discernment (choose 2 or more):

1 Kings 3:5-10

Proverbs 2:1-11

Romans 12:1-18

2 Corinthians 2:9-13

Philippians 1:3-11

Hebrews 4:12-16

Luke 22:24-29

Include as part of your prayers the following:

Prayer for the Diocese of Toronto's Discernment of a Coadjutor Bishop

Almighty and All-Present God, who delights in those who earnestly seek your will, grant to your Church the riches of wisdom and discernment, that for such a time as this, a servant-leader may be chosen who reflects the character and wisdom of Jesus Christ. May this Coadjutor Bishop be strengthened through the encouragement and power of the Holy Spirit, as they labour for renewal, strive for unity, and seek those isolated and far from God; we pray all these things through the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

60 minutes Watch episcopal nominee videos once again (as a group if possible). Include a 1-2 minute break between each. Write down any observations & questions.

Silent Reflection. Without conversation, quietly reflect on the following:

- 20 minutes
- What key themes arise as you reflect?
 - What questions or areas of uncertainty arise?
 - Do you sense the Holy Spirit's encouragement and prompting? Where?

40 minutes Group or Small Group discussion

At our previous Diocesan Synod in Nov. 2017, Archbishop Johnson posed questions of discernment towards the upcoming episcopal election. Use them as a guide as you reflect on the nominee videos and/or printed materials. As in all matters of discernment, ensure your conversations are characterized by grace and humility, especially if/when addressing challenging themes:

- From your own experience of bishop(s), what are two qualities you have admired in a bishop? (and how are these reflected in the nominee's responses?)
- What are two critical issues affecting the life and mission of this Diocese today? (and how are these issues addressed in the nominee's responses?)
- Considering that, what two qualities (maybe the same or different from #1) does the next bishop need to have to lead this Diocese in its mission into the next decade?

The purpose of this exercise is not to come to a group decision or consensus about a particular candidate. Rather it is to help each participant listen to one another in forming their own understanding or decision.

15 minutes Gather and note any key areas of discernment that arose from the day and commit them to ongoing prayer. Your church community may choose to collect these themes and share them with the synod members of your community in preparation for voting at the electoral synod.

Closing Prayers

1. Pray for each candidate, giving thanks for their willingness to engage this process of discernment, and for the families of all the candidates.
2. Pray for the members of synod, that they listen carefully for the Spirit's leading.
3. Pray that the elected candidate will embody the qualifications found in the document, Episcopal Ministry.
4. Pray for the candidate to be chosen as Coadjutor Bishop, for their family, their preparation, and spiritual health & strength.
5. Pray for the Church in our Diocese that all of us may be faithful witnesses to Christ and exercise the gifts God gives us for ministry in our world.