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Missional Leadership

Thank you Archbishop Ron for the invitation to be present for this meeting of the Provincial Synod. It is always a delight to come east and especially to be at home here in Halifax albeit for but a few days.

It is fitting that on a day when we are thinking about missional leadership the whole Church remembers and gives thanks for Columba, that great 6th century missionary. He was an Irish monk; a mighty abbot overseeing a network of monasteries felt called at age forty-two to be a pilgrim for Christ among the Scots. Iona would become his base and from there he set off on numerous missionary journeys. So steadfast and so fruitful in his labours, he would in time be regarded as the Apostle of Scotland. He died in the spring of 597, as Augustine landed on the coast of Kent in England to lead a mission for Christ among the Anglo Saxons.

In his life of Columba, Adomnan who himself was abbot of Iona from 679 to 704 A.D. wrote this of Columba

“He was angelic in appearance, elegant in speech, holy indeed, outstanding in talent, and great in power. He was tireless in preaching and praying and in performing fasts and vigils. In the midst of all things, he was loving to all. His holy countenance was always smiling and in his inner most heart he rejoiced with the gladness of the Holy Spirit.”

With awe and thanks for Columba’s ministry and the internationally renowned ministry associated with the Community of Iona. The Church throughout the world prays.

God our Father, who gave to your servant Columba the gifts of courage, faith and cheerfulness, and sent people forth from Iona to carry the word of your gospel to every creature; grant we pray, a like spirit to your church even at this present time. Further in all things the purpose of our community, that hidden things may be revealed to us and new ways found to touch the hearts of all, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

When I was entrusted with the Office of Primate for our beloved Church eleven years ago, I was overwhelmingly aware that among the responsibilities is the charge to lead our Church “in discerning and pursuing the mission of God”. (Canon III)

On the very first page of the Handbook of the General Synod, one can find a Mission Statement that reads as follows:

“As a partner in the worldwide Anglican Communion and in the universal Church, we proclaim and celebrate the gospel of Jesus Christ in worship and action.

We value our heritage of biblical faith, reason, liturgy, tradition, bishops and synods, and the rich variety of our life in community.

We acknowledge that God is calling us to greater diversity of membership, wider participation in ministry and leadership, better stewardship in God's creation and a stronger resolve in challenging attitudes and structures that cause injustice.

Guided by the Holy Spirit, we commit ourselves to respond to this call in love and service and so more fully live the life of Christ."

While it is a fine enough statement, likely the final text of what would have been umpteen drafts, it is way too long. Who could possibly commit it to memory?

In the 2007 – 2010 triennium, I along with others in key leadership roles in our Church National, invited the Church into a conversation eliciting what people felt was important for the life and work of our Church going forward. All that was received by way of feedback, was sifted and sorted and clustered into something the Church came to know as Vision 2019, gathered under a banner in which Anglicans across Canada would describe themselves as "a people seeking to know, love, and follow Jesus in serving God's mission in the World".

This is a much briefer statement of who we are and what we are about. It holds much more potential for commitment to memory than the one I quoted earlier. It grounds and roots us in the Mission of God. It says we are not so much an institution as a movement of people committed to a Jesus way of living in this world. It calls for leadership in the Church that must be missional in outlook.

So what does such leadership look like? Let me begin some reflection by referencing a prayer attributed to Archbishop Oscar Romero, but actually written by Bishop Ken Untener, a bishop of The Episcopal Church. It is entitled "A Future Not Our Own". Here are a few excerpts.

"We accomplish in our lifetime only a fraction of the magnificent enterprise that is God's work. ...

This is what we are about. We plant seeds that one day will grow. We water seeds already planted knowing that they hold future promise. We lay foundations that will need further development.

We cannot do everything, and there is a sense of liberation in realizing this. This enables us to do something, and to do it very well. It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way, an opportunity for the Lord's grace to enter and do the rest. We may never see the end results, but that is the difference between the master builder and the worker.

We are workers, not master builders, ministers, not messiahs. We are prophets of a future not our own."

What I appreciate about this prayer is that it is both wonderfully principled and pragmatic. It grounds me. It is essentially a prayer about leadership that bears the hallmark of humility.

That virtue is often mistaken for meekness, quietness, and gentleness. In truth, it is about something greater. In his book "Humble Leadership", Graham Standish reminds us that the word humility is grounded in our creation. Adam is created out of "adamah" or "dirt". The word "human" comes from the Latin for dirt "humus". To become humble means first, to recognize our "earthiness" ...and then to recognize that into this "earthiness" God "breathed the breath of Life". "Humility", writes Standish "is an awareness and appreciation that we are a combination of dust and spirit", the spirit giving us life.

At some length referencing Moses, the Psalmist, the authors of the Proverbs, the prophets, and Jesus, Standish teaches us that humble leadership is one that is "radically open to God's guidance and grace". It is leadership "in which we lead from faith rather than fear, from a willingness to let God's will flow through us rather than willfully insisting that our own will be done, from hope rather than cynicism, from love rather than selfishness, and with God's power rather than our own power. When we lead with an openness to God, we allow God's power and grace to flow through us. We make prayer and discernment a foundation of our leadership, always seeking first what God wants, and then leading others in that direction by inviting them to the same kind of humble prayer and discernment."

Such humility is the hallmark of Missional Leadership. There are of course other marks too, but they are complementary to this all important one. It is foundational. But what might some of those other marks be?

- ❖ Missional Leaders know and delight in the Word of God – The story of God's ways with the World. They know the biblical narrative of creation and fall, slavery and exodus, empire and exile, homecoming and banquet, redemption and renewal, gospel and grace, a new heaven and a new earth. They know the story and they have an amazing capacity to help the people of God to live the song they sing, "Let us build a house," writes Marty Haugen,
"where all are named,
their songs and visions are heard,
and loved and treasured,
taught and claimed as words within the Word."

(Hymn # 641, Evangelical Lutheran Worship)

- ❖ Missional Leaders are men and women who embrace the view of one of the most highly respected and much loved Primates of our Church, Howard Clarke who was often known to say, "Could there ever be so great an adventure as to follow Jesus Christ in a life of devotion to his Gospel for the world?"

- ❖ Missional Leaders around the world have responded enthusiastically to the Archbishop of Canterbury's call for a Global Wave of Prayer that many more people will come to know Jesus Christ. <https://www.thykingdomcome.global/> The hope of this initiative is that in praying together Christians will be transformed, given new confidence and encouragement by the Holy Spirit, to be effective in their witness to Christ.

First launched in 2017 this initiative touched the lives of millions of people around the world, – not just of the Anglican Tradition, but many others as well.

- ❖ Missional Leaders around the Anglican Communion are taking to heart the call of the Anglican Consultative Council for a Season of Intentional Discipleship a few years taking us to and beyond the Lambeth Conference in 2020. <http://anglicancommunion.org/mission/anglican-witness.aspx> It is a call renewed emphasis on evangelism, catechesis, and the formation of individuals and communities for a joyful, faithful, steadfast witness to the Gospel.

The image of discipleship with which we work is broad. It effects every aspect of our living, - the way we worship, how we read the Scriptures, the company we keep in breaking bread and the company we keep in serving Christ especially among the poor and marginalized, the political choices we make, and the way we care for creation.

This holistic view of discipleship is in keeping of course with the Marks of Mission embraced by Anglicans worldwide and with the Vows we make through the Baptismal Covenant.

- ❖ Missional Leaders embrace the Joy of the Gospel. In his first “Apostolic Exhortation on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today’s World”, Pope Francis called for a new chapter of evangelization, marked by “joy”. Using Paul’s exhortation to the Philippians, “Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say rejoice”. (4:4) Francis speaks into the life of the Church a word of challenge and encouragement, calling on every faith community to be an “evangelizing community” filled with joy reflected in “the beauty of the liturgy” and in “the daily concern to spread goodness”.

Francis delights in “the inexhaustible riches of the Gospel”. In a world where many live with the stench of poverty and disease, corruption and oppression, war and want of every kind. Francis speaks of “the fragrance of the Gospel”.

He is well known for his declarations –

- Let us not allow ourselves or the world to be robbed of the joy of the Gospel.
- Let us not allow ourselves or the world to be robbed of hope.
- Let us not allow ourselves or the world to be robbed of community, of communal love!

“We need always” writes Francis, to be “making the Church constantly go from herself, “keeping her mission focused on Jesus Christ, and her commitment to the poor. God save us from a worldly church with superficial spiritual and pastoral trappings! This stifling worldliness can only be healed by breathing in the pure air of the Holy Spirit who frees us from self-centredness cloaked in an outward religiosity bereft of God. Let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of the Gospel!”

Missional Leaders will heed this call.

- ❖ Missional leaders, according to former Bishop of Oxford John Pritchard, “help the Church resist its centripetal tendency to expend all its energies on its own domestic agendas. The gospel Jesus left us was about...transforming lives and communities till the earth is filled with the glory of God”.
- ❖ Missional Leaders live out of the story of Jesus teaching in the synagogue in Nazareth.

Given the Scroll of Isaiah, he unrolled it and found the place where it is written “The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.”

And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say, “Today, this Scripture is fulfilled in you hearing.” (Luke 4:16-21)

In the spirit of that text, missional leaders walk the streets of the neighbourhood in which their church is set; they walk the streets of the village, town and city. They look, they listen, they become more aware of the social and pastoral needs of the community. They find out who the poor are, who is living in captivity in its many forms from addiction to domestic violence to the grip of racism, to the horrors of slavery in the sex trade. They forge partnerships with others in the community to free people. They work hard at opening the eyes of the blind – especially the willfully blind, those who simply will not see the suffering of others, those who pass by on the other side of the street.

Missional Leaders work hard investing in programs through which the Church is making a real difference. It becomes all that Jesus calls it to be – bread for the poor, hope for the desolate, light for the city, salt for the earth.

Missional Leaders are imaginative. Convinced that church properties are facilities for God’s Mission they imagine how that might be so in very real ways. Their imagination calls people into conversations, sometimes exciting, sometimes daunting, about refurbishing the buildings to better meet the needs of the community. Sometimes such conversation lead to a total repurposing of the property.

Missional Leaders see that the text from Isaiah which Jesus read in the synagogue became a mantra for his entire ministry. They are convinced it must be a mantra for the ministry of the Church. They work in the hope that there is sufficient evidence in what the community sees and hears of the Church's ministry that it is able to say, "Today, that ancient text is being fulfilled in our very midst."

- ❖ Missional Leaders are holders of the Vision – the vision of a parish, a diocese, a province, a church national, a worldwide Communion. They hold it before the community at all times. Sometimes such holding is by way of cheering on and encouraging. Sometimes it is asking hard questions and helping the community to realize it has lost sight of its vision. The leader calls them back to it, time and again, as needs be.
- ❖ The Missional Leader is not a lone ranger. He or she will gather people around them, and makes of them a team, whose various charisms and competencies enable a community to live out of its vision and values, and its priorities in ministry.
- ❖ Missional Leaders from an Indigenous perspective embody the Seven Grandfather Teachings – humility, respect, truth, honesty, wisdom, courage and love. And do this in a way that is exemplary for the entire community.
- ❖ Missional leaders learn to live with commendation and criticism. They discipline themselves and their perseverance in the spirit of the great prayer written by Reinhold Niebuhr.
"God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; the courage to change the things I can; and the wisdom to know the difference".
- ❖ Missional Leaders, while very active, follow the example of Jesus in taking time to retreat, to go away to a quiet place, for a few hours and for a few days, for a few weeks, - to rest and read, to pray about major decisions, to seek spiritual guidance, to be renewed in their devotion to the role entrusted to them by the community.
- ❖ Missional Leaders express thanks to all who engage in the Mission of God. In this habit, they follow the lead of St. Paul. Almost every one of his Letters begin with a greeting in the spirit of grace and gratitude. His loveliest writings in this regard are to be found in his letter to the Philippians.

"I thank my God every time I remember you, constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now...It is right for me to think this way about all of you because I hold you in my heart...Know that I am confident of this that the one who began a good work in you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ." (1:3-5, 7, 6)

Well dear friends, you have been patient with my ramblings. What I have shared is true to my own experience of having been called “to lead” our Church “in discerning and pursuing the Mission of God”. I trust it has been something of a helpful contribution to your focus on the theme of “leadership” in this Synod.

I would like to conclude my remarks by sharing with you what will be my last Church-wide initiative in helping us to reflect on our faithfulness in the service of God’s Mission. In September, our Church will mark the 125th anniversary of the formation of the General Synod. I am inviting Anglicans across the country to gather in circles of conversation with respect to the “Heartbeat of our Church”.

They will have opportunity to reflect on a passage in the heart of the Farewell Discourse in the Gospel of John. There in the Upper Room Jesus is speaking to the disciples about friendship – about being called, chosen, appointed to go and bear fruit, fruit that shall last. He commends them to live their lives according to his command that they love one another. (John 15:12-17) I have always thought of this discourse as the abiding conversation into which Jesus calls his followers in every generation.

In light of the call to be the Church in the way Jesus speaks, everyone will then have opportunity to describe a time when our Church made their heart glad, when it made their heart ache, when it gave them hope.

The gatherings will conclude with an opportunity for people to express their heartfelt prayer for our Church.

I hope many will take up this invitation. I trust we will hear many stories and many heartfelt yearnings for our Church, and its ministries in the name of and after the heart of Christ himself.