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## Report on Missional Leadership for Provincial Synod 2018

### What is “missional leadership”?

As the invitation to submit this report suggests, “missional leadership” is a vague way of describing the exercise of church leadership, one we believe poses significant hazards. Because our faith community still assigns positive notions to the word “mission,” calling our leadership “missional” without a clear and commonly held sense of what that word means<sup>1</sup> entails at least two risks. First, because the word “mission” subtly conveys a Divine mandate, by using this term we risk preemptively associating the orientation we are operating under as leaders with the Divine will. Secondly, this risks precluding legitimate criticisms of the unintentional harms our leadership decisions and styles of decision making might make. After all, how many congregants feel able to adequately articulate to a set of well-educated religious elite that their vision of “missional leadership” fails to adequately embody the Gospel in their community?

We begin with this proviso not as a repudiating of the task of describing our “missional leadership,” but rather as a confession that we have heard these words used—and at times used them ourselves—more for their rhetorical power to pursue an end that we have already decided upon for pragmatic reasons than for any distinct (or theological) meaning that they might convey.<sup>2</sup> We confess this because we believe that what we define as “missional leadership” today we may discover tomorrow to have caused harms that we have not intended, or dared not consider. This does not mean we renounce the task of describing our “mission leadership” so much as entering into that task of description with humbly recognizing that our descriptions are likely inadequate, and may be excluding voices we are not able or not willing to hear at this time.

With that caution in place, we agree with the provided definition of a missional church as one based in “*being* a missional church.” As Anglican priest and ethicist Samuel Wells has argued,

God is with. God’s whole being is shaped to be with. Being with is about presence, about participation, about partnership. It is not about eliding difference, or denying separation, or neglecting otherness. On the contrary, it is about being present in

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<sup>1</sup>One could argue that the Marks of Mission of the Anglican Communion is our clear and commonly held definition of what “mission” is. However, we take it that our need to have national church marketing campaigns to instill this sense of mission in us is indicative of just how clear and commonly held these notions are outside our circles of “missional leaders.”

<sup>2</sup>For instance, what would happen to our report and the reports of others if we substituted the word “entrepreneurial” for “missional”?

such a way that such contrasts and tensions are made visible, recognized, named, and embraced, rather than ignored, suppressed, or exploited.<sup>3</sup>

For Wells, it is *presence* that best describes God's character, our relationship with God (God is with us), and prescriptively, the character of our relationships with others. Thus, "Time with others—time that is not inherently purposeful, goal-oriented, and solution seeking—is not wasteful, indulgent, neglectful or worthless: it is, on the contrary, the goal of creation, the *telos* of humanity, and the vision of God."<sup>4</sup>

This is one of the guiding assumptions of our definition of "missional leadership" and how we are trying to exercise it in the Diocese of Quebec. To this end, we are working towards methods of decision making and forms of ministry that attempt to embody the way "God is with us" in how we live with each other and the land:

1. At the request of a parish corporation and a deanery ministry committee, we conducted a theological ethnographic study on one of our congregations to help facilitate the discernment of the parish corporation and buildings' future. This involved in-person meetings with parish representatives, as well as a study of the surrounding area, and some primary documents produced by parish members. This theological ethnographic reflection ended by providing the parish with a theological methodology in order to make their decision about whether or not to close in a way that preserved their conscience and commitment to faithful discipleship. Having received this theological reflection and decision-making methodology, they used it to guide their discussion and made the difficult decision to close as a corporation, and to sell its buildings, but to continue meeting to celebrate the eucharist and to continue in fellowship with one another.
2. At the request of another parish corporation and the bishop, we held a similar series of meetings to help a congregation discern its future. After engaging in some dialogical theological reflection over a meal, the corporation (which was determined to close at the beginning of the meeting) decided to give a new experimental service a try, rather than close. After talking about the gifts of the land and the beauty of the surrounding area, together we began to brainstorm how we might use the location of the church to begin recognizing and celebrating God's gift of creation and educating ourselves about our responsibility toward it. (The discussion especially focused around the fifth Mark of Mission and the vow in our baptismal covenant: "To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth.") The parish began with an experimental winter "Epiphany Stargazing Eucharist," where Anglicans from the surrounding region came to worship and to drink hot chocolate while they learned about the stars with an amateur astronomer (to be with God, with creation, and with each other). It was so well received that this parish will be putting on a quarterly eucharistic deanery-wide service celebrating creation in the rhythm of the seasons, followed by a time

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<sup>3</sup>Samuel Wells, *A Nazareth Manifesto: Being with God* (Malden: John Wiley & Sons Ltd., 2015), 8.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, 62.

of eating, fellowship, and going outside to explore creation—not a big fuss or a lot of work, just time meaningfully spent together being with God and each other.

3. At the beginning of last August, in response to the massive number of migrants crossing on foot over the Canada-U.S. border into Quebec, and in response to the rising tides of xenophobia and white supremacist groups in our society, we initiated, planned, and helped to lead a pilot project entitled “Meeting Jesus at the Border.” Rather than a protest, this was a eucharistic pilgrimage that celebrated welcoming the stranger: an act in solidarity with both those crossing on foot, and those who have been engaged in welcoming them. As the main border crossing for refugees is in the Diocese of Montreal, we developed this program as a bi-diocesan partnership, in which both our diocese organized study groups within our respective territories, which reflected theologically on how God is revealed to us through our reception of the stranger. We then made a trip to the actual Canada-U.S. border (within the Diocese of Montreal) where Bishop Mary and Bishop Bruce co-presided over the eucharist. Although we released the exact location of the event only a week ahead of time to discourage its disruption by white supremacists, we had a remarkable turnout of more than 60 people, including refugees, members of the Haitian community in Montreal, Indigenous peoples, Anglicans, Roman Catholics, and United Church members, and citizens from both sides of the border, some who commuted from as far away as Toronto in order to participate. The event ended with a very moving liturgical placing of an icon of the Good Samaritan at the border crossing itself.

We use these three typological examples of “missional leadership” to show how our current orientation is to be present and to listen to the people and the places that we find ourselves in, to pray and to be prayed for. To be with God and to be with one another.

**Looking toward the future we are also considering how to:**

- Redevelop our cathedral close to help us to better embody the way “God is with us” in the neighbourhood of Old Quebec City (the provincial capital).
- More equitably share our financial resources between congregations, orienting ourselves away from self interest towards the common good.
- Redevelop our diocesan decision-making structures and methodologies to allow us to better be and lead with our Naskapi members.
- To be better friends with our Muslim and Jewish neighbours, as well as those folks who are more recent migrants in the places where we dwell.

**How can the Province of Canada help your diocese with these or other initiatives of missional leadership?**

We are not sure if it can. Following the principle of subsidiarity, and given the understanding of “mission leadership” that we hold, it is not currently clear to us what help the Province of Canada can offer that our diocese cannot currently do on its own or together with its immediate neighbours. We believe that God has already given us everything we

need to be present and attentive to God and to one another. One of our biggest fears as church leaders is that we might neglect or substitute the content of the Gospel with the structures our forebears designed in order to proclaim it.

**In conclusion, we would like to offer a prayer attributed to the ministry of Archbishop Oscar Romero that continues to guide our diocese's sense of "missional leadership":**

It helps, now and then, to step back and take a long view.

The kingdom is not only beyond our efforts, it is even beyond our vision.

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

Nothing we do is complete,  
which is a way of saying that the Kingdom always lies beyond us.

No statement says all that could be said.

No prayer fully expresses our faith.

No confession brings perfection.

No pastoral visit brings wholeness.

No program accomplishes the Church's mission.

No set of goals and objectives includes everything.

This is what we are about.

We plant the 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 provide yeast that produces far beyond our capabilities.

We cannot do everything, and there is a sense of liberation in realizing that.

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.