

THE DIOCESE OF THE WINDWARD ISLANDS

Diocesan Office:
Tel: 784-456-1895
Fax: 784-456-2591
Email: diocesewi@vincysurf.com



P. O. Box 502,
St. Vincent &
the Grenadines
West Indies

The Rt. Rev'd C. Leopold Friday, B.A., M.A.

PASTORAL LETTER **From the Bishop of the Windward Islands.**

To our well Beloved in Christ – the members of the Church in the Diocese of the Windward Islands.

Greetings in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour. We the clergy and lay delegates, of the Diocese of the Windward Islands assembled for the celebration of the Holy Eucharist to mark the opening of the thirty seventh (37th) Triennial Session of Diocesan Synod in our Cathedral Church of St. George, Kingstown, St. Vincent and the Grenadines on Sunday 6th October 2019. This was preceded by a procession from the Bishop's College accompanied by the St. Vincent and the Grenadines Royal Police Force Band.

We deliberated on the many concerns impacting the life and witness of the Church in our Diocese. Our daily business sessions were conducted at the Green House, Pembroke, St. Vincent and the Grenadines from Monday 7th to Thursday 10th October 2019.

We prayed and at all times relied upon the guidance of God the Holy Spirit, as we deliberated and made decisions which we believed would result in a greater understanding of, and a deeper level of commitment to, what our Lord and His Church demand of us at this time. Each morning our sessions were preceded by Morning Prayer and Reflections and at noon the celebration of the Holy Eucharist.

We were aware of the great responsibility we had to determine how we could faithfully participate in God's mission through our ministry across the three Nation- States of St. Vincent & the Grenadines, Grenada and St. Lucia.

The focus of the synod was on Intentional Discipleship with the following theme: **Empowered by the Spirit: We Renew, Transform, Sustain, Proclaim.**

We were pleased to welcome observers from within the Diocese and outside. From our Companion Diocese of Calgary came the Most Rev'd Gregory Kerr-Wilson and the longstanding Bishop's Commissary in the United Kingdom, The Rev'd Canon Bruce Sharpe, Our Diocesan Youth Director, Mrs. Sherrie-Ann Auld Mark, former Chancellor, the Honourable Justice Francis Cumberbatch and others.

The Rev'd Canon Noel Burke from the Diocese of Barbados led the daily reflections. He unpacked the theme using the spirit of the Liturgy and highlighted the need to constantly examine our liturgical life and ritual prayer. To this end, he reminded the synod delegates that liturgical spirituality finds expression in the *lex orandi, lex credendi*, loosely translated the law of prayer is the law of belief or what is prayed is what is believed. In other words, if you wish to know what Anglicans believe join us in worship and prayer- what we do is what we are. Renewal, transformation, sustenance and proclamation must be rooted in what we do together.

In His Charge which was based on the text: **“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (Acts 1:8)** The Bishop called the synod and members of the Diocese to:

Renew

- a) Renew our baptismal covenant, to renew our commitment to Jesus Christ our Lord;
- b) Reaffirm the promises made at our baptism;
- c) Acknowledge that we are creatures before God and take our baptismal covenant seriously;

- d) Accept our mutual dependence upon each other, and to value and utilize one another's contributions;
- e) Present ourselves – our lives, our time, talent and treasure, as “a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God” (Romans 12:1).
- f) Affirm our faith, by turning to Jesus Christ and accept Him as our saviour;
- g) Put our whole trust in his grace and love;
- h) Renounce Satan and all the spiritual forces of wickedness;
- i) Renounce injustice and all the evil powers of the world; we reject sin so as to live in the freedom of God's children.

Continuing he said, all the baptized are empowered by the Holy Spirit to carry on various ministries for the good of all – and on behalf of – the congregation. All the baptised are Disciples, ministers. As Disciples and members of the Church we need to accept our mutual dependence upon each other, and to value and utilize each other's contributions. Through the gift of the Holy Spirit in baptism, we have all been given talent that needs to be shared for the proper functioning and wellbeing of the Church and community. Everyone plays an important role in building up the Church. All are Disciples.

As disciples our commitment or service is not a private matter that can become lackadaisical or be withdrawn at any time. This is contrary to the biblical understanding of Commitment and Discipleship. Christians are not volunteers but Disciples.

We carry out our responsibility as Disciples not because we feel like doing so on a particular day, but rather out of a sense of faithfulness – indeed, obedience – to God. This is made clear at our baptism. Baptism is not a private matter. It does not only concern the priest/deacon, the person to be baptized and the family. All baptisms ought to take place within the Eucharist as the chief service on a Sunday or other feast, for the congregation plays an essential role in every baptism, because the sacrament of Baptism belongs to the entire church.

Transform

As he made reference to people's lack of commitment to God and the Church and the low attendance at worship today in relation to the past when there was greater respect and commitment for God and the Church and churches were filled for worship. The Bishop said those of us who are aware of this are concerned, and that this has led some to suggest that we need to transform our liturgical practice to attract people especially the youth back to Church. There are calls for us to throw away the forms of worship which we have inherited from the early Church. For many, to continue in the present path will only lead to extinction.

However, can it be that through it all God is transforming his church and at the moment because we don't know nor understand where God is leading us we are prepared to Change God's church for him rather than allow God to work God's purpose out? As The Rev'd Dr. Michael Clarke has said:

"The Church has seen many deaths and it can afford to do this because the Church is not the external structure or practice but the life-giving spirit within the institution. Like the soldier crab, it wears a shell until that shell no longer fulfils its needs. When as priests we are focused on the life-giving spirit within the church because we journeyed with that Spirit and we know and are known by it, we are less disturbed by the metamorphosis that of necessity must go on - as we witness the Church changing from one degree of glory to another. If the caterpillar had awareness, it would be mortified going into its chrysalis state and if it was to do all in its power to prevent the dissolution of its membranes, the world would never know the butterfly. On the other hand, if the caterpillar could preserve its consciousness, it would never know the freedom of being a butterfly."

He continues: "Hence, rather than chasing after the structures to buttress them, it is in this time, that the Church needs to come to its center..... As the times change and the nature of engagement changes we must be extremely mindful of our core purpose and use this time to lift this core purpose up. The age of decline, in fact, is not so much an age of decline but an age of transformation. The world as we know it in the Caribbean is transforming. The process is rapid and nothing - nothing is being allowed to

escape the transformation. However, the nature of this transformation is on a higher plain. The nature of this transformation is about becoming more aware, more conscious.”

The Marks of Mission of the Anglican Communion opens up opportunity to engage various questions and concerns of today’s society namely the environment, evangelism, empowerment and elitism. It is true that most if not all of our clergy and the leadership of the church today are the descendants of slaves or indentured servants. The question though is, has there been a transformation in the way we see ourselves and how we relate to each other as disciples and people generally and in the way we carry out our ministry and manage the affairs of the church or is this change only cosmetic? We must acknowledge the Anglican Church’s role in slavery and colonialism in our history as a Caribbean people. In so doing we must endeavor to correct the errors of the past and not perpetuate the vestiges of these aspects of our history. We must ensure that we are being faithful to the Gospel and not abusers of the privileges which are extended to those who are proponents of it.

With regards to Human Sexuality the Bishop referring to Resolution 1:10 of the Lambeth Conference 1998 and related documents said: The Holy Scriptures and Christian tradition teach that human sexuality is intended by God to find its rightful and full expression between a man and a woman in the covenant of marriage, established by God in creation, and affirmed by our Lord Jesus Christ. Holy Matrimony is, by intention and divine purpose, to be a life-long, monogamous and unconditional commitment between a woman and a man.

The Lambeth Conference 1978 and 1998 both affirmed 'marriage to be sacred, instituted by God and blessed by our Lord Jesus Christ'.

The New Testament and Christian history identify singleness and dedicated celibacy as Christ-like ways of living. The Church needs to recognise the demands and pressures upon both single and married people. Human beings define themselves by relationships with God and other persons. Churches need to find effective ways of encouraging Christ-like living, as well as providing opportunities for the flourishing of friendship, and the building of supportive community life.

We also recognise that there are among us persons who experience themselves as having a homosexual orientation. Many of these are members of the Church and are seeking the pastoral care, moral direction of the Church, and God's transforming power for the living of their lives and the ordering of relationships. We wish to assure them that they are loved by God, and that all baptised, believing and faithful persons, regardless of sexual orientation, are full members of the Body of Christ. We call upon the Church and all its members to work to end any discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, and to oppose homophobia.

Clearly some expressions of sexuality are inherently contrary to the Christian way and are sinful. Such unacceptable expression of sexuality include promiscuity, prostitution, incest, pornography, pedophilia, predatory sexual behaviour, and sadomasochism (all of which may be heterosexual and homosexual), adultery, violence against wives, and female circumcision. From a Christian perspective these forms of sexual expression remain sinful in any context. We are particularly concerned about the pressures on young people to engage in sexual activity at an early age, and we urge our Churches to teach the virtue of abstinence.

The challenge to our Church is to maintain its unity while we seek, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to discern the way of Christ for the world today with respect to human sexuality. To do so will require sacrifice, trust and charity towards one another, remembering that ultimately the identity of each person is defined by Christ.

Whether with regards to human sexuality or other areas of human endeavor the church must be careful that it does not criminalize or demonize those who hold views and have practices which are different from ours and of that, much of which we do not yet understand. We must not fall to the temptation to misuse and abuse our position of power and trample on those who are in the minority or who are powerless.

Sustain

Moreover, ensuring that we have food for the journey is very important for us as Disciples, for the ministry we carry out is not our own.

Some factors affecting ministry in the Diocese are:

- (1) The numbers of people that attend church and generally speaking people's commitment and regard for God and the Church have decreased.
- (2) The majority of our clergy are over fifty years of age and there are those who will retire in the next two to ten years.
- (3) There are some parishes which are experiencing financial as well as human resource challenges.
- (4) We are seeing a decline in the number of persons offering themselves to the ordained ministry.
- (5) While we continue to receive qualified, competent and dedicated Christians to serve at the Parochial, Archdeaconry and Diocesan levels; in some areas this is lacking.
- (6) Although there are youth groups and youth ministry, Sunday School and Christian Education classes in some parishes, there is need for a more focused and concentrated effort in these ministries.

If we are to sustain our ministry over the next ten to fifteen years, we need by the grace of God to make disciples and to work towards the development of wholesome family life and build strong and stable families. We are to be readily available to parishioners and people in the community.

Empowered by the spirit I am confident that with prayer, reading and studying Holy Scripture, regular worship and reception of the Body and Blood of Christ and participation in other sacramental rites of the church, sustained effort, and adequate resources, this can be achieved.

Proclaim

As we proclaim the Gospel of the Kingdom of God, it will be important for us to interface with government through our parliamentary representatives and other social partners including our youth.

We must endeavor to create relationships of trust, respect and forbearance through which we listen to, interact with and challenge each other. Consequently when we witness to the power of truth it is out of a context of love and concern for the wellbeing of all people and for our nations and world and we'll be doing so from an informed, knowledgeable and concrete understanding of the prevailing circumstances and underlying realities.

Further the Bishop said some of the challenges we face are poverty, cultural alienation and imitation, external Influences, dependence, and fragmentation. Human trafficking, drug trafficking and consumption, domestic violence and abuse, adultery, child molestation and abuse. Family reconfigurations, and Institutional Injustices, and the rising expectations of our youth.

Continuing he said in spite of our due diligence in proclaiming the Gospel, there will always be those moments when others are offended by our proclamation for it is not always easy to acknowledge the truth especially when we are in positions of power: As Archbishop Gomez has said: "Anglicans have traditionally been marked out as a distinctive group of Christians who optimize the essential nexus between the prophetic, the pastoral, and the practical. This means that the challenges of and inequities in society that assault the rights and freedoms of human beings to pursue wholesome and fulfilling lives can be comprehensively addressed through the total ministry of the Church. In effect, this often brings the Church into a fertile, and sometimes acerbic encounter with the structures of power and governance, as it seeks to speak truth to power. But this should hardly ever restrict or restrain the church from bearing faithful and courageous witness to the power of truth."

Therefore, we can use our own faults and failings as opportunities to identify with people's experiences and to counsel and guide them. When we proclaim, it is important that we do not cause people to focus so intensely, so deeply on their faults and sins that they see themselves beyond God's redeeming love and grace; that they become blind to the good news of the forgiveness and transforming

power of the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Jesus Christ our Lord. People must hear of the goodness and graciousness of God: the redemptive love of God in Jesus Christ.

Taking its cue from the Lord Bishop's Charge, Synod conducted its deliberations in clusters that focused on Education/schools, Evangelism and Christian Education, Youth and Servers, Family Life, Organizations, Administration, Finance and Property Management, as well as Social Concerns.

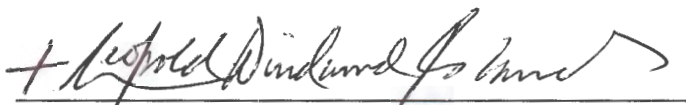
The clusters recognized the importance of strategic planning and developed plans of action to chart the way ahead. One of the reoccurring ideas was the vitality of social media to assist with the proclamation of the Gospel. Additionally, a revised Clergy Stipend and Compensation Package was recommended to the synod and implementation was agreed to, effective 1st January, 2020.

A number of resolutions were debated, some passed and others were referred to relevant commissions for consideration and action. The synod expressed its mind on social media as a tool in its proclamation of the Gospel. While, it acknowledged the usefulness of it, there was a reminder of the possible negative impact on spiritually.

The Bishop conferred on former Diocesan Chancellor, The Honourable Justice Francis Cumberbatch the title of Chancellor Emeritus for his learned advice, wisdom, dedication and commitment to the Diocese and years of outstanding service, which he continues to offer even though he has demitted office. This we believe emanates from his love of God and the Church.

We commend this Pastoral Letter with our Lord's words to his disciples **"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."**

Acts 1:8



The Rt. Rev'd C. Leopold Friday
Bishop of the Windward Islands