

BISHOP'S RESPONSE TO PRE-SYNOD MEETINGS

It is just a few days before our Synod on November 13 and I wanted to offer some further thoughts to you about what we heard at our pre-synod meetings. I want to say that as we worked at preparing our 2011 budget, it was the consensus of all concerned that we are pretty much left with a bare bones expense sheet. We have made major cuts over the last years with more being proposed but this does not deny the importance and value of any of our ministries and initiatives. Those who spoke so passionately in our pre-synod meetings about the importance of a particular ministry are absolutely correct and justified in what they have said and there is no doubt that if our financial situation was different, we would want to find a way to address each of these concerns.

One of the comments that was expressed on more than one occasion was the fact that timing seems wrong to add a new position at Synod office when we are cutting long standing outreach programming like St. Matthew's House, University Chaplaincies and others. I want to speak to you directly about this concern because from a particular point of view I can understand the sentiment.

I want to say that staffing at Synod office has always been and will continue to be a very fluid process. Each year positions have come and gone without any reference to how that is viewed in the context of the rest of the budget. In the past two and a half years we have seen a reduction in our Synod Office staff by six and half positions and we have reduced our apportionment to the National Church by \$80,000. We have seen recently that this and other reductions to the national Church have resulted in MASSIVE staff cuts.

In the course of those two years I have been attempting to build a team that will enable us to respond more effectively and realistically to the particular challenges we face as a Church at the present time; a team that will allow us to move our Vision forward. As you know I have devoted myself and the Episcopal office to the emergence and the articulation of this Vision that I believe is, in fact, a movement of the Holy Spirit in our midst! When I first shared this Vision with the clergy at a Clergy Day, one of my colleagues issued me a challenge. She said that while the Vision was filled with a great deal of hope and promise for the future, that we had all seen this kind of thing many times before and for the most part these strategic plans and visions always end up sitting on a shelf somewhere gathering dust. Her question and challenge to me was to make a commitment that this Vision would be different. It was a challenge that I have taken to heart but the time and effort that I have given to this endeavour has taken me away from other important pieces of my work. I am saying to you, as the one who is responsible for building the team that will be instrumental in taking our Vision to the next level, that the staff person for whom we have made provision for in the budget, will be absolutely critical to the work of making this happen.

At this stage of the process we need someone for whom the Vision is their primary responsibility. We know that two of the areas of focus in the Vision will need some special attention. They are Prophetic Social Justice and Outstanding Leadership as it applies to the work of facilitating ministry covenants with parishes. The work of animating the vision will no doubt evolve and develop more fully in the days ahead. As synod delegates, you have been provided with a summary of the benefits we believe this new position will offer the people of the diocese. As well, a sample of a ministry covenant has also been included for your benefit.

The hiring process for this position will involve an advertised call for applications and a committee will be struck to provide me with a short list of candidates. I will then ask three representatives from Synod Council to join with me for the final interviews. It will be my decision in the end, but I will listen carefully to the advice of all those involved.

I also want you to know, however, that we have heard loud and clear, the concerns that you have around our support for outreach, for university chaplains and for youth work in the Diocese. Here is what we intend to do in order to ensure that our support and relationship with these groups will continue to the best of our ability.

I have asked the chair of the Prophetic Social Justice petal to meet with representatives of St. Matthew's House in order to begin a discussion to explore how the diocese can continue to support and fund the important work of St. Matthew's House in new and creative ways. This conversation has begun and you will hear more about this work in the coming months. I too have recently met with the Board of St. Matthew's House and I can tell you that we have shared understanding of the opportunities and challenges that are before us and we have committed to continue to work together cooperatively.

Likewise, we are drawing together the ecumenical chaplaincy councils of the university's that we currently support to determine how we can best continue our relationship and examine what it is we can do to ensure this work will continue. This meeting is in place and you will hear about these endeavours as well. We would also like to explore ways we can support chaplaincy work with the other post secondary institutions in our diocese, namely Mohawk, Sheridan and Niagara Colleges.

We heard at the pre-synod meetings a deep concern that Joyce Wilton's position as a children and youth ministry consultant was not being replaced. I have heard that and I want to assure you that children and youth ministry continues to be a top priority to me in my episcopacy. I have spoken to Christyn Perkons and she has developed a structure whereby children and youth programming for 2011 will continue without any disruptions. Further, a youth committee has been struck that will ensure this work will not only continue but expand in new and exciting ways.

There was concern also expressed at these meeting regarding the Annual Appeal that is being proposed for our diocese. People have commented that there is not yet enough information about the why, when, and how's regarding this new endeavor. I point you to the convening circular and the report that has been provided by Archdeacon Michael Thompson and Mr. Jim Newman about the Annual Appeal that may provide more details and insight into this program.

Finally, let me say that I understand that as we continue to move toward a healthy financial position that we are going to continue to struggle with difficult and painful decisions. But I hope that we can also acknowledge the fact that this Budget represents the first steps toward a Vision driven budget and a Vision driven Diocese and we need to rejoice in this and give thanks to God for the exciting signs of the Kingdom that continue emerge all around us. Thank you for your care and your passion for this work that you display in so many ways and thank you for the privilege you have given me to share in this work of ministry with you as fellow members of the body of Christ.

Bishop Michael Bird