

Liberating Us for Ministry Our Charge to Synod: Part Two

“What should our new directions and our priorities be as a diocese for the year and years ahead; what is the Charge we are creating together?”

That was the question I posed to the delegates present for our 142nd Synod in November as I invited them to create the second part of the charge with me. I was inspired to do so by the powerful scripture reading of the feeding of the five thousand. In it, Jesus enlists the twelve disciples to share in his work and ministry. He then gives the crowds a dramatic demonstration of the fact that our proclamation of this kingdom is not just some far off, distant hope and dream. It is a reality that can be witnessed to and experienced, right here and right now!

The response was incredible! Never in my 33 years of ordained ministry have I seen such an outpouring of passion and commitment to the proclamation of the Gospel. The sum of what we generated on that day at Synod was 10 pages of directions, encouragement and urgings to take our work together to the next level.

The message that God is sending us out to proclaim the kingdom has obviously been heard and received. It is abundantly clear that we share a strong desire to enhance our ministry in the areas of justice, outreach, inter-generational programs, leadership development, engagement and visibility in our communities; and in the areas of discipleship, faith formation, education, liturgical renewal, resource management and parish support (particularly for those who are feeling the burden of limited financial capacity). There was also a strong appeal to reimagine our calling as a Church and a renewed desire to draw people and congregations together as we explore and utilize the gift of faith and the rich resources we have been blessed with by God. A summary highlighting the responses will be made available on our website with this charge, so that it may be of use as we discern our future directions.

As I prayerfully contemplated how these responses would inform our priorities and directions in the coming months, I was reminded that on March 1st, 2018 we will mark the tenth anniversary of our shared ministry as diocesan bishop and people of the Diocese of Niagara. It occurred to me what we are being called to enter into is a time of preparation that will launch us in 2018 into a year of “Jubilee” or “Liberation.” It is a beautiful and grace-filled challenge that we encounter in the Old Testament, particularly in the Book of Leviticus.

Some of the themes that might inspire and guide us into this Jubilee year are as follows:

- Liberating our lives to embrace Jesus’ call to discipleship.
- Liberating our ministries to move beyond our church buildings and to become more visible in the public square of our communities.
- Liberating leaders in the diocese for innovative and faithful ministry.
- Liberating our imaginations and our understanding of our calling to be the Church; reimagining our structures to help empower us for this ministry in the 21st century.
- Liberating our parishes to live with greater vitality and sustainability.
- Liberating our voices to stand with and for those of God’s people whose voices are silenced and who are bound by the forces of poverty, violence, prejudice and warfare.

Together, we have a wonderful opportunity to celebrate our diverse communities. And we will dream new dreams for a vibrant and sustainable future, free from all that binds us up and prevents us from fully living into God’s mission of healing, compassion, hospitality and justice in the communities we serve. As a next step, I will be working collaboratively with Synod Council to put in place a plan to mark a Jubilee year in 2018.

I would like to close with a profound word of thanks to the delegates of our 142nd Synod who have joined with me in offering the people of Niagara a powerful statement of hope and discernment for the work we will engage in together in the coming year and beyond. I look forward to experiencing the ways that this great mission and challenge will be lived out in our common life together in the days and years to come!