



OFFICE OF THE BISHOP OF NIAGARA

ANGLICAN CHURCH OF CANADA

October 8, 2021

TO THE PEOPLE OF THE DIOCESE OF NIAGARA

*"The Lord is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in him, and he helps me.
My heart leaps for joy, and with my song I praise him."*

- Psalm 28:7

Dear friends:

With Thanksgiving observances happening this weekend, I would like to offer some reflections through this letter about thankfulness – not in the kind of Pollyanna *everything's-alright-if-we-just-don't-look-at-the-pandemic-kind of thankfulness*, but a deeper, more profound thankfulness; a thankfulness that is expressed by believers in God's goodness and love for us in season and out of season. This is not to ignore the ongoing pandemic and its reality for our every day living, but for a brief moment let us broaden our perspective.

Now, come to think of it, this might not be an easier topic, because it's challenging to give thanks in a season of adversity such as the one we're passing through. It is also not entirely fashionable to speak of giving thanks in the midst of adversity. It seems somehow insensitive - as if we're not taking adequate notice of suffering. And yet our scriptures tell us differently; they do enjoin us to give thanks always:

"Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you." - 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

"I will sing of the Lord's great love forever; with my mouth I will make your faithfulness known through all generations. I will declare that your love stands firm forever, that you have established your faithfulness in heaven itself." - Psalm 89:1-2

These are just two examples that we find in the Bible of many, many instances of persistent and insistent thanks-giving in *all* circumstances: in the midst of death, pestilence, exile, persecution, and many more conditions in which we might reasonably struggle to do so.

Never, ever, do we hear that giving thanks is easy in these circumstances. That would be a lie and not our lived reality. What we *do* hear is the conscious decision to give thanks to God in the midst of challenge. We hear St. Paul, the Psalmist, and Jesus give thanks for God's love and God's strength and wisdom in the community of faith as that community struggles with hardship and distress.

Some days it's hard to give thanks and I don't want to minimize the hardship we are living through on so many levels. We are in the midst of a global crisis after all and we are also in the midst of a cultural crisis. But the scriptures also remind us that *krisis* – in the Greek, is a moment of decision – to turn and follow the way of God's love.

We are in *krisis*, but there is an opportunity within this time to do differently and so very much better by a recommitment to fulfilling our baptismal vow to respect the dignity of every human being. This is especially the case for our relationships with those in our communities who are Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC).

We are also in a profound moment of *krisis* with regard to our beautiful planet and its climate. The commitment to do differently in order to save and preserve her is gaining momentum. And I give thanks for that – these moments are long overdue.

I'm giving thanks that the *krisis* has produced fruit close to home in this diocese. We have done hard but good work to fulfil the commitment we made last Synod in the form of our Mission Action Plan. This month, the [Niagara School for Missional Leadership](#) launched. This school is for lay and ordained people to help learn new skills to shape our diocese differently for the future. I pray you'll use this time to engage with the learning on offer - eight courses will be offered in the winter term. Deepening our faith, learning new skills to be the Church in a new time is a good use of this period we're passing through.

I'm also giving thanks for the generosity of people up and down our diocese who have offered their resources to support our crucial ministries through the [Ignite: Faith in the Future](#) annual campaign. Thank you for your tangible support. The Church must still be the Church, especially in times of *krisis*.

I am so proud and grateful for those who have specifically given to the diocesan Pandemic Response Fund. Do you know that you have supported 15 food security and anti-isolation ministries at a time when their need has been incalculably deep? What a way to make the outworking of our faith tangible and effective! I am giving thanks to God for your generosity.

And I am thankful for the lifelong service of all our Order of Niagara recipients, without whom the Church could not fulfil her mission. Dean Tim Dobbin and I have been honoured to meet so many recipients as we deliver our diocese's highest expression of thanks. We give thanks to the Lord for the gift of their skills and dedication as they fulfil their Christian vocation.

None of these things are easy in normative times. And certainly, none of the sacrifice of time and resources come easily in the midst of adversity. But you have offered it all willingly because of the motivation that underlies it all: your faith in Christ – for that is the engine of words of love and works of mercy.

And so, this year – a hard year from every perspective – it's a different kind of Thanks-giving I do. It is deep and it is real and rooted in the opportunities and gifts of *krisis*. May God, from whom all blessings come, bless this moment and all the good works that come from it.

Happy Thanksgiving to you and yours. And, "let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful." --Colossians 3:15

In the abiding and generous love of Christ,



The Right Reverend Susan J.A. Bell
Bishop of Niagara