The Bishop's Charge
to the 152nd Synod of the Diocese of Niagara
by The Right Reverend Dr. Susan J.A. Bell

Saturday, November 7, 2026

Scriptural References: Joshua 4:1-11, Ephesians 3:14-21, and Luke 24:13-3

Friends, members of synod, I want to begin with words we know by heart. Say it with me?

> Glory to God,… **whose power, working in us, can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine. Glory to God from generation to generation, in the Church and in Christ Jesus, forever and ever. Amen.**

We say or sing it at the end of every service. It is hard-wired into our Anglican psyches, a piece of our shared *lingua franca*.

But here's my question: do we hear ourselves as we smile at each other and say it? We know it off by heart, but what space does its meaning actually take up in our hearts?

I have always loved this doxology, and never more than since I became a bishop. Perhaps, since my consecration as your bishop almost 9 years ago now, I feel the weight of it more. Perhaps it is the privilege of the episcopal visits that take me the breadth and length of our diocese and give me an expanded view of our family – and of the importance and preciousness of each member of the family. Perhaps it is the deep, cellular, urge to live the truth of what we sing together,… sometimes even with tambourines!

A doxology is not a conclusion to be tidied away. It's a way of seeing, and a way of sending. That is why it comes where it does in our worship, as the church's closing breath. Today as we gather together to think, and to pray, and to do the business of the Church, I want us to consider these lines, borrowed from Ephesians 3, and how, joined by two other readings, they hold together a whole theology of what the Church is and how faith passes from one generation to the next.

In what follows, I've elected to focus on an area of our shared life together as a matter of priority for how the Church is called to "be" in this season – this does

not mean that we neither see nor value the totality of the facets of our lives together, just that we need a closer look at this one area. We are zooming in on this area at this Synod, through the lens of the doxology.

"Whose power, working in us"

Notice where the power lives. It is where our mission action planning processes begin. The power is God's, and it is "working in us." We do not minister by the power of our own elbow; we do not create faith. This verb is present and active. The Spirit is already at work in the Sunday school teacher, the grandmother bringing the grandkids to church, the teenager running the sound board, the father who prays in the car on the way to hockey.

This changes how we think about handing on the faith. If the power is God's, we are not the manufacturers of belief in our children and youth. We are witnesses, companions, and gardeners - and that is both a tremendous relief and a tremendous responsibility. We have a big shift to make, you see.

Because it's different now. We're different now. Our children and youth are different now. And we can't go back.

Too often I hear parochial committees sound like Back-to-Egypt committees, devoted to what I call terminal nostalgia. They resist change and yearn for the mythical days of two hundred children and diocesan youth ministry programs, when all was right with the Church and world; not unlike the people who wanted to head back to Egypt after being liberated.

But you and I know that hindsight is never as clear as we make out. It is distorted by wistfulness. That's the nostalgia part. The terminal part is that remembering this way, instead of dealing with the world and people as they are now, will kill us. It is a fiction, and doing the same thing over and over as if it were not, won't work. We are a post-Covid, post-secular, social media and AI immersed people now and our children and youth must make their way in this world – not yesterday's world.

Joshua's people could not go back to Egypt either. They had crossed the Jordan, and the priests who stood in the riverbed holding the ark did not hold it so the people could return to the far bank. They held it so the next generation could cross. That is our vocation: to bring the best of what we have been into the future, and to understand what this part of the body of Christ needs from us now – and I think they are telling us.

What are our young people telling us?

What I hear about, again and again, is loneliness. There is an epidemic of it among young people, and, at the other end of life, among older adults.

An article in the *Church Times*[1] this January argued that the Church is uniquely placed to respond, and I agree with this premise. Loneliness, and the social isolation it results in, is a serious concern – as the comparison of loneliness to smoking fifteen cigarettes a day demonstrates. And from Statistics Canada, we know that roughly one in four Canadian youth experiences significant loneliness, making youth one of the most socially isolated age groups in the country. One. In. Four.

Health systems can refer people to services, but they can't manufacture belonging. But the Church can offer what they cannot: a permanent neighbourhood presence, regular worship of the living God, multigenerational mixing, volunteering for humanity that gives purpose, and relationships that are, in the article's words, a covenant of love, not a contract. The motive is theological, not utilitarian.

Jesus went to Zacchaeus in his tree and the woman at the well. We are made in the image of a relational God. Ministering with the lonely is holy work, not merely helpful work. As the article warned, our response will determine whether future generations see us as essential social infrastructure that builds the kingdom, or merely as heritage architecture.

One answer, I am convinced, is contemplative spirituality – particularly because it is so untouched by this world. It is unpackaged. It is unmodified by AI content generation. It moves at the rate of relationship, and it is a form of resistance to the artificiality of our world. It teaches us to pray again and puts us in touch with a power beyond our own capacities.

This is why I am so committed to the religious among us. Another article, in *The Living Church*, asked whether religious orders can help revitalize the Church.[2] It's what I have been asking myself since the Archbishop of Canterbury raised this question almost a generation ago.

The author describes three gifts that a community like this can offer a congregation, and uses the image of the heart for each.

The first is a **heart of prayer**. Think of how your own heart works. It draws blood in from the whole body, and sends it back out again, steadily, day and night. A praying community does the same. Through its daily rhythm of prayer, it gathers in the worries and griefs of the world and sends the life of Christ back out. It's a heartbeat for the whole body. It's not a claim to be better Christians. It's a service to all of us.

The second is a **heart of repentance**. This is the gift of being honest about our need to begin again, and of having people and practices ready to help us do it. Most of us don't know where to take our regrets. A community trained in

[1] https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2026/16-january/comment/analysis/analysis-churches-can-prevent-loneliness

[2] https://livingchurch.org/covenant/can-the-religious-life-revitalize-the-episcopal-church/

listening, confession, and spiritual guidance can make that road a little easier to find.

The third is a **heart of friendship**: not the friendship of shared hobbies or similar tastes, but friendship rooted in a shared commitment to grow in Christ. That kind of friendship deepens a church's care for one another. And it doesn't stay inside. Prayer, repentance, and friendship all flow outward, into the service of those who are most vulnerable. So, prayer and good works. Seems pretty biblical to me.

This article really helped me bring into focus the reasons why we continue in our work of discerning the foundation of a new monastic community, St. Brigid's in Niagara, which will live at our Cathedral. I thank Canon Ian Mobsby for his specialized gifts and for the holy urgency for this work. And I especially thank the Sisters of the Church, who have loved us for generations. We need their prayers more than ever, and God bless the impulse to re-establish this ministry and rule of life among us. Thank you for your support.

And, members of Synod, you might like to know that our Sisters are helping to support the foundation of St. Brigid's in terms of resources as well as prayers. And the Society of St. John the Evangelist is doing likewise. So, we have sisters and brothers and many other faithful, generous donors praying for us and helping us. What a blessing!

So, as you can see, I'm putting these two conversations together, the loneliness of our young people, the renewal of religious life, and I'm adding a third idea: that our churches are to be both communities of resistance and communities of rest. A church can be a community of resistance, where worldly trends are reimagined and reclothed in Christ, and a community of rest, where a weary generation can stop, breathe, and be held. Our young people need both. They're telling us, they need both.

"Infinitely more"

Then comes the astonishing phrase: "infinitely more than we can ask or imagine." Most of us, I think we must confess, that when we ask God for stuff, ask small.

We ask for a few more volunteers, a working furnace, a youth group that fills the basement, and maybe most fervently: a balanced budget. And look, I don't want to spend too much time on this here, but I imagine that you've already flipped to the budget page in your convening circular anyway, so let me say that we do have a balanced budget – in fact, we are even in a small surplus position before capital items. Canon Ellie and Christine will say more about that very good work later, members of synod, but it is a cause for rejoicing and for not resting on our laurels. When we can get off the page and treat our resources as a source of possibility for mission, then we know we're contemplating money like Christians.

So, these are good prayers, but the doxology gently and firmly stretches us. God's imagination is larger than ours, and the God who raised Jesus from the dead is not limited by our worries of what's possible. Puts a different face on it, doesn't it when you remind yourself of that?

So, imagine congregations where children and youth are not a program but a presence, where they read, sing, serve, pray and, here's a good one, preach alongside us!

Imagine again, youth who help shape our Synod's priorities because their vision of creation care, justice, and belonging is clearer than ours. Imagine families, in every shape God has given them, finding in our parishes and missions a place where their questions are welcome and their gifts are needed. None of this is fantasy. Much of it is already happening.

Let me tell you a story. Once there was a young girl from a loving single-parent family. Church was a godsend: a wider community of mentors and a wonderful, loving support network. Because the people there saw her interest in faith, they invited her, genuinely, into many ministries. She knew the invitation was genuine, so she took it seriously. She sat on the committee that supported worship and was asked her opinion, seriously. She sang in the senior choir from just about the moment her age would allow. She joined the youth group and was made a delegate to the national church's councils. She was offered leadership roles in the liturgy, and as a sidesperson, she got to know people.

She was seen, heard, and nurtured. Because the community treated her as part of its present and did not postpone her gifts to some future date, she knew she was valued, and she stayed. She stayed through the awkward teenage years, through the transition gap years and the finding-her-way-in-the-world years, and in the face of an aggressively secular culture and all the nonsense about a supposedly "declining" church. And she became a leader in that church. That in truth, was a foregone conclusion, not just because God said so, but because the Church took seriously its commission to transmit the faith from generation to generation.

You know that story, Synod. You know young people, past and present, who could tell it. Some of them are in this room, including me. Because here's the thing: that young girl was me.

"From generation to generation"

The heart of the doxology is its rhythm. Glory does not stop with us. It moves like a river through time. Each generation receives the praise of God from those before, adds its own voice, and passes it on. The faith has never been a possession. It's like a relay race: a gift received in order to be given.

Joshua understood this. He told the people to take twelve stones from the riverbed and set them up, so that "when your children ask in time to come, 'What do those stones mean?' you shall tell them." The stones are not the

point. The question is. God's people arrange their landscape so that a child will ask. What are our stones in Niagara? The font? The table? The stories of who carried us through our own Jordans. A child who asks, "What is that for?" is a gift, and we are asked to be ready with an answer, told with knowledge and joy and not with embarrassment.

That's also why, folks, you must take care of your own ongoing, up to date, Christian education. You've got to be able to make an intelligible account of your faith to the young person who wonders why you do this thing? Why do you believe, and what?

So ask yourself: do I know my faith enough to make an account of it to a little one, to the ones I love? If the honest answer is no – perhaps speak to your priest, perhaps attend a study at your church, perhaps participate in the Grandparents Club, perhaps take a course. Take Christian Foundations through the NSML – it is just what it says: a course that takes you through the basics of your faith.

Whatever you choose, please choose something, and don't wait. Prepare yourself for the most important work you will ever do: to pass the Christian faith onward.

Think of how you first heard the name of Jesus. For most of us it was not through an argument but through a person. For me it was my grandmother singing in the choir beside my great-aunt, leaving her Bible open at Psalm 121 around the house; my mother who was the Sunday school superintendent at our church; a friend who set a place at the table for anyone and everyone; a priest who both sat by a hospital bed and opened the scriptures to me.

You see, faith travels through relationships, and relationships take time, attention, and presence. That is why the commitment to children, youth, and families is not one ministry or programme among many. It is the way the Church breathes.

And we have many channels along which this presence and relationship and faith travels both in our parishes and beyond. "Beyond" is a particular challenge and I want to specifically thank our school and university chaplains for their tremendous efforts to live and preach Christ in largely secular environments and for offering the love and knowledge of Jesus to so many young people.

A single chaplain may see hundreds of young people every day and their influence, whether they realize it or not, is tremendous. I am going to ask them to stand, as I want you to see them Synod because we so often don't, and to understand that they stand as a bridge for so many young people into the community of faith and out to the world; our school chaplains: The Reverend Judy Steers, The Reverend Craig Luccock, Rebecca Vendetti, and The Reverend Dr. Dan Tatarnic. And our university chaplains: The Reverend Andrew Hyde, Marlice Simon, and The Reverend Krista Hilton.

These, members of synod, are the folks who, on our behalf, have the cure of souls, who are the face and hands of Christ for hundreds of youth. These folks are one of the ways that we relay the faith. Thank you for your service, chaplains.

And here's the thing: this relay runs in both directions. Our young people are not only receivers of the tradition. They carry new insight, asking what our liturgy means, whether our welcome is real, and how we mean to care for the earth they will inherit. This is what Paul prays for when he asks that we grasp the breadth, length, height, and depth of Christ's love "together with all the saints." Together: no generation grasps it alone. When we listen, we are transformed. The faith is handed on, yes, but it's also handed back, renewed.

"In the church and in Christ Jesus"

Finally, the doxology holds two realities together: glory "in the Church and in Christ Jesus." Not the Church alone, as though we were a club, and not Christ alone, as though faith were private. The body and its Head, as one. When we pass on the faith, we do both at once: we draw young people into a community of belonging and into a living relationship with the Lord who gathers it.

On the road to Emmaus, two disciples walk away from Jerusalem, heavy with disappointment, and a stranger falls into step beside them. He doesn't lecture. Instead, he asks questions and listens to their story before he opens the Scriptures. Only at the table, in the breaking of the bread, are their eyes opened. Then they get up that very hour and run back to tell it.

Well, that is the pattern. Walk alongside. Listen first. Open the Scriptures. Break the bread. Then watch the Spirit send them running. Our young people and families are on their own roads, some weary, some burning with questions, many carrying gifts we have not yet seen. The risen Christ is already walking with them, and we are invited to be good company on the way.

What this could mean for the world

Here is my hope, and I offer it with joy. A church that truly practices generational faith becomes a gift to a fragmented world. We live in an age of isolation, where young, middling and old often inhabit separate worlds. So just imagine parishes that look and feel different from the prevailing culture, where a seven-year-old, a seventeen-year-old, a forty-year-old, and an eighty-year-old pray, eat, serve, and dialogue together, and discover that they need one another. That is not merely good church practice. It is a sign of the kingdom, a small picture of the reconciliation God intends for all creation.

So, if this vision of a unified but also diversified kingdom seems well to you, have we got some great news. Kristen Jackson-Dockeray, our newish CYFM coordinator, is going to talk to you more during Synod and help you think about how you can bring this vision to life – or continue to nurture it – but rethink it. And Dr. Emily Hill, in her Mission Action Plan report, will also speak

more about how this will feature in our plans for the future. Because, members of Synod, this is how we are called to life – and compelled to love as the diocese of Niagara in this next season for the Body of Christ.

So, get ready for a shake up Niagara. We have new generations to learn from and new generations to pass on the gift of the church to. God will give the gifts of faith and growth. God always does.

Thanks

Members of Synod, before we go any further, I want to do something that never feels like enough: I want to say thank you. A diocese is not a structure. It is a family of people, and I -we -are surrounded by remarkable ones. Our diocesan staff team is here to support you, to resource you, to come alongside you, and to serve you. This work is a ministry and we are all 150% committed to it. So, first and foremost, I'd like to thank them all collectively.

And I want to offer some particular thanks too. To Emily and Ian, our missioners. They are the drivers of both deep care and understanding, and of the prophetic and holy work of getting us to raise our heads and see and hear the new things God is calling us to. They are a wonderful team, and they accomplish miracles on the regular. I mean that quite literally, Emily and Ian. Parishes and missions are better loved and shepherded, and our imaginations are wider, because the two of you walk alongside us. Thank you both so very much.

To Derek, Lorna, Turner and Pieter: these folks, are the people whose hard work keeps the physical plant of Cathedral Place running smoothly. It is complex work – especially recently - and we're so grateful for their support.

To Kristen, Monica, Hannah, and Deirdre: your work animating ministry with children, youth, and families, with faith formation, with the Niagara School for Missional Leadership, and with justice and outreach, respectively, forms the backbone of our service and support to the diocese; equipping us for ministry in profound ways that so often transcends parish boundaries. Everything I have said today about handing on the faith, finds its feet in what you do, week in and week out. You make the doxology, and our baptismal promises, walk around on two legs.

To Dani, Kim, Hannah, and Shannon, and to Mark, Kim, Jovita, James, and Debbie, whose professional and administrative gifts are so vital to our ministry together, thank you. Synod, their combined talent makes things function, and I appreciate every one of them. So much of what makes a diocese work happens in the background, quietly, and it works because of them.

And, to Jane Wyse. This good and faithful servant celebrated 25 years of ministry with us at the start of this year. If you have ever felt welcomed to the episcopal office, or helped, or quietly rescued, there is a very good chance Jane was behind it! She cares for us with wisdom, with compassion, and with a gift for getting things done that I can only marvel at. And she cares for me,

patiently and generously, every single day. I truly cannot imagine this work without her. Jane, you are truly a blessing to us all.

And now to our senior leaders; Archdeacon Bill, Christine, Dean Tim, Canon Greg, and Archbishop Colin.

Members of Synod, I would like to thank, on my behalf and on yours, your Secretary of Synod, and our Executive Officer, Archdeacon Bill Mous. If you have ever picked up the phone or sent an email to Bill with a question, a problem, or a vague sense of dread about a canon, you already know what I am about to say: you were met with kindness first, and then with a very reasonable answer. Bill is that rare person who is as pastorally caring as he is deeply knowledgeable, and who carries the administration of this diocese with both skill and grace. He knows where everything is, and he knows how everyone is. He is most certainly a gift to this diocese, and he is a gift to me.

Likewise, may I say that our treasurer and director of finance, Christine, does work on our behalf that is so very fine. She consistently goes above and beyond, and she gives us not only her gifts and accounting acumen but her heart. The hours of are long, the spreadsheets are innumerable, and the inbox is overflowing, yet she lives her vocation in our midst with such grace and generosity, and we are deeply indebted to her for her faithful service to our diocese.

And members of Synod, it is such a joy to work with our Dean, Tim Dobbin. Tim is a fine rector of Christ's Church and a most diligent and wise Dean. His vision for our Cathedral is rooted in Gospel love for our neighbour, a deep faith, and a pastoral heart. We are all very blessed by his leadership.

I am tremendously grateful for our diocesan and, indeed, our provincial Chancellor, Canon Greg Tweney. Greg's gifts are rightly acknowledged far beyond the borders of our diocese. He is wise and full of care for both Bill and me and for all of Niagara, and we are so thankful for his sage counsel and every-ready and generous support.

I am very grateful, too, for the presence and ministry of our assistant bishop, Archbishop Colin Johnson. He is known far and wide in the Canadian Church and international church for his wisdom and experience, and I am so glad he is sharing both with Niagara.

I also want to thank all of our clergy across the diocese for their constant work of nurture and transmission. You baptize and teach, you sit at bedsides, you prepare families for the sacraments, (two, as necessary for salvation) and you welcome a young person's first tentative question as the gift it is. Much of this work is unseen and rarely counted, but it is the relay of faith itself, and I am proud to serve alongside you.

Now, there are three priests whom I would like to particularly recognize and, with the Dean, confer upon them the title of Honorary Canon of Christ's Church Cathedral. They are the rector of St. Mark's, Niagara-on-the-Lake,

Leighton Lee, the rector of St. George's, Guelph, Victor Kischak, and the Chaplain at Appleby College: The Reverend Craig Luccock.

Each have in their hard-working and generous ways, supported the diocese through their parish, school and in the wider church. Niagara, we are blessed with the riches of so many leaders, but it is a pleasure to lift these three up as an example of all the ways in which we are called to life and compelled to love, ignited by the irresistible love of Jesus. Many congratulations to you three – and we'll look forward to your installation in January.

And thank you to all the volunteer leaders on all the committees of the diocese. Yours is the specialist work of handing on our many containers for ministry, and of stewarding the resources that make the transmission of faith sustainable. Faith travels through relationships, but relationships need buildings, budgets, policies, and wise governance to hold them. You tend those containers faithfully, often without applause, so that those who come after us will find them sound and ready to be filled.

Folks, I know that my words are a poor substitute for the depth of my thanks for you all. But I hope you'll accept them as they are profoundly meant. Each of you in your way offer yourselves wholeheartedly to the service of our beloved diocese. It takes all the people, with all of their gifts, to help us as a diocese listen, to respond, and to move into the future in Christ's name, for the good of the Church that God loves so much.

We are, all of us together, the body of Christ. Every part matters, and no part is the whole. So, Niagara, to each of you, named and unnamed, thank you. You are living proof that God's power, working in us, can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine.

So, as I draw this charge to a close, let's say this doxology again. I'm going to ask you to stand this time – and I'm going to ask you to proclaim it boldly as an investment in the body of Christ: in our children and youth, as the fulfillment of our Christian vocations and as a promise to Jesus. Let's carry on today in our work with its expectant hope:

Glory to God, **whose power, working in us, can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine. Glory to God from generation to generation, in the Church and in Christ Jesus, forever and ever. Amen.**