



**BISHOP'S CHARGE TO THE THIRD SESSION
OF THE FIFTY-SEVENTH SYNOD OF THE DIOCESE OF NELSON**
Holy Trinity Richmond 11 October 2019

Theme: Gratitude

This is my first address to Synod as the 11th Bishop of Nelson.

My brothers and sisters, I stand here today humbled by the opportunity I have been given by God to serve this great diocese. I am grateful to the Electoral Synod for the trust you have bestowed. I am also mindful that I step in the footsteps of forebears whose devotion and sacrifices I admire. I particularly think of previous bishops, clergy and lay leaders who have served this diocese over the last 160 years, proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus. If it were not for them I would not be standing before you today.

I thank Bishop Richard Ellena and the team at the Diocesan Centre for their service to this diocese and their immense support throughout this period of transition.

Six weeks in, there are certainly challenges and I will be stretched, but I know that this is where I'm called to be. It's a profound privilege to serve this Diocese and I am grateful for the support of colleagues and the Grace of our loving God.

The theme for this Synod is 'Gratitude', and as I look across the diocese there are amazing things happening - many parishes and ministry units punching above their weight to be a faithful witness of the Lord Jesus

in their communities. Well done. Amidst all the challenges you face, you have kept faith alive, sometimes at great cost.

I think we don't celebrate enough. We tend to minimise what we have and to notice challenges perhaps more readily than we count our blessings. So in addition to the great reports of gratitude in the Synod papers, I look forward to hearing more stories of gratitude in the video presentations. God has been good to us, hasn't he?

Two years ago, I joined the Kepler Challenge race. Kepler is a 60km mountain run. I had never run a marathon before and I had three weeks to train for the race. I felt out of my depth but with the support of my family, race-mates who gave me good advice about pacing myself, energy drinks and the grace of God, I did it!

What kept me going was that I had a chance to do something many people love to do but don't have an opportunity, as the race can only take 450 participants and its normally sold out in July within minutes.

My feelings as I prepared to run the Kepler resonate somewhat with my feelings now. Feeling somewhat terrified by the task ahead and excited at the same time.

I'm excited about the season ahead:

- Because we are grateful for all the Lord has given us
- Because we know that God is building His Kingdom
- Because we are convinced that the Church of Christ will prevail because Jesus is its Lord and Head.
- Because we are confident that God has given us all that we need to fulfil His purposes on earth.

By His grace over the next 10 years, I would like to focus on the following priorities.

Priorities for the New Season

1. Gospel priority

That we will be living, breathing, speaking, celebrating and being energized by the good news of Jesus - The Gospel.

We live in an age when people are open to trying anything – desperate for hope, meaning, purpose - the Good News! Perhaps some of us may have become a bit apologetic, ‘ashamed’ of the Gospel. Perhaps we have become discouraged by the effort we put in and limited fruit/results from our perspective. Maybe we’ve been let down.

The words of Paul come to mind. *For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile*¹

The age Paul was in seems similar to the times we live in today and the gospel challenge is similar.

In my previous role with NZCMS, I constantly heard stories of Muslims encountering Jesus sometimes in a dream and looking for Christians to explain the dreams to them. I thought, that happens out there. Could it happen here in Aotearoa New Zealand?

Six week’s ago, Rosemary and Kavee, who had come from overseas for my ordination and stayed to minister in parishes, had an incredible encounter with a student in Nelson. The duo made a Kenyan meal to serve the community and shared their own stories. At the end of the meal, a student asked for prayer to receive Christ.

I heard another story of visitors in one of the Cathedrals in the country asking if there was someone who could baptise them as they had encountered Christ.

Listen to the words of Jesus ‘Don’t you have a saying, ‘It’s still four months until harvest’? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields!

¹ Romans 1:16

They are ripe for harvest. Even now the one who reaps draws a wage and harvests a crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together. Thus the saying 'One sows and another reaps' is true. John 4:35-37 (NIV)

The spiritual hunger we see around us presents us with an unprecedented opportunity for sharing the good news. God is causing many people to hunger for him-across generations.

There is a sense of urgency in a world desperate for good news.

In order to bring fresh energy and perspectives to our mission, I suggest we explore ways we as a diocese might receive the gifts of the global church by welcoming 'reverse missionaries'. Over the next 24 months, I would like us to explore the possibility of bringing half a dozen interns/gospel workers from the majority world to serve in one of our deaneries for 6 months to a year.

I pray that we will see and sense the direction the Spirit of God is blowing, and align our hearts, lives, and our communities of faith to the opportunities of mission in a new era.

2. Discipleship

That discipleship would be a key feature of ministry around here. It's encouraging that a number of teams across the Diocese are participating in the Good Soil Collective. I know that's one model and doesn't necessarily suit everyone. However, whatever model of discipleship you prefer or are working with, the question is:- What is it and is it raising disciples?

Who are you discipling?

How do you identify those to disciple/invest in?

Pray for God's leading and look for those 'people of peace' around you.

When I was with the navigators, we had an acronym for 'potential disciples'- FAT- Faithful, Available, Teachable.

Often these might be people who have potential to influence others. People who notice what needs to be done and get on with it.

What can you do if discipleship journey is something you want to explore further? Doing life with others and sharing what God's teaching you and how that's impacting your life, and decisions is perhaps a good start.

My daughter was about to sit her restricted driver's test last week, so we went out for a practice run and I noticed she was driving about two km above the speed limit. I realised she had learned it from me. Ouch! What are people imitating from you?

3. Leadership Development - Pathway for lay and ordained

It has been said before that 'Everything rises or falls on leadership' and I tend to agree. Outside of divine intervention and prayer, everything does truly depend on the quality of leaders a ministry or organization has. If we're not intentionally raising leaders, then having money, systems, plans and vision would still not be enough to see growth.

Coffee harvesting

I grew up on a coffee farm in Kenya. As subsistence farmers, we needed to work together with our neighbours to find enough workers to help us with the harvest. We had a short window to harvest the coffee, when the bean was perfectly ripe, and to take it to the cooperative. If you did not organise workers to help you with the task of harvesting, some of your crop went to waste.

Jesus says "The harvest is plentiful but the labourers are few".² So where are we going to find these labourers? These leaders?

Well first up, let's take Jesus at His Word "Pray therefore that the Lord of the harvest would send out more labourers into the harvest field"³.

² Matthew 9:37

³ Matthew 9:38

This should be a daily prayer “Leaders, leaders, leaders. Lord give us more leaders”. Would it be great if we populated our system with something like 20-30 people who could plant or lead a church in the next 5 years? Wouldn’t it be great if in 10 years we have an over capacity of trained leaders that we send them out to other churches beyond our diocese and even overseas?

The size of the harvest you gather depends on how many harvesters you have. We are all harvesters but we need leaders who can lead culture change.

These harvesters are leaders who need raising up. Jesus didn’t leap into the field and spend all his energy harvesting – his strategy was to invest his time in 12 disciples. The first thing he did was find his leaders and grow them.

Who will continue your work?’ How many young leaders are you investing in? How are we passing on the baton of leadership to the next generation⁴?

Interesting that Moses found 70 leaders in a day⁵ because they were already there.

Sometimes the people God’s calling as labourers in the harvest are not who we would choose.

Would you have chosen the 12 disciples? Jesus saw people who were perhaps overlooked and he intentionally invested in them, he empowered them. Andrew, Peter, James and John were business owners. Matthew was a tax collector so he knew how to handle criticism.

So ordained ministry, while it is vital, is not the only pathway for serving in the diocese. We are blessed to have many people in self-

⁴ Ps 71:18

⁵ Num 11:10-25

supporting leadership! This is a real strength and a resource that can help us move forward.

The Challenge is for us to pray in, notice, call out and find the budding leaders who are right under our noses, to identify potential and call out their gifts and journey with them.

In one of the staff teams I worked with, we would have a list of people we were praying for whom we considered potential leaders or people worth watching or investing in. You could sometimes notice who these were because they hang around you a lot, were keen to serve, took initiative, had positive influence on others, were teachable.

How might this look like?

I think the need is to create an ethos of multiplication and explore what our leadership pipeline will look like. A place to start is the internship programme at BTC which I reckon is a fantastic opportunity to train your leaders and for people to test vocations in ministry. Who could you send to BTC next year?

When we view our population profile, most of our Diocesan family members are older and our total annual attendances in churches is falling. But the “good news,” is that we can work out how to mobilise this resource of elderly passion and experience to mentor the younger leaders. Young people can work alongside these experienced faithful people in our family, providing energy and enthusiasm.

We have this great treasure of faith passed on from generation to generation. We must not let it die under our watch. What role will you play in raising up the next generation of leaders to fulfil God’s purposes?

Approach/Mindset that I suggest might help us achieve the vision to grow:

a. Belong

We are family! I'm encouraged by the unity we already have and I would hope that this will continue and deepen. We are a network of diverse churches unique in style, demographic and preferences but we have come together as the body of Christ, united by the Spirit. I would like to see the gospel be what we unify around and not be divided on secondary matters. That we major on majors and minor on minors. So don't major on Maina - what he's doing or not doing.

You are in the team and we all have a role to play in the growth of this diocese. Let us be known as grace-filled people. People who open our lives to others, even when it is not convenient. People of hospitality and radical generosity. That we would grow in our intercultural engagement and discover the beauty and joy of being one family across our diverse cultures. In this new season I invite us to move beyond our "my ministry" mentality into "God's ministry" or Kingdom mentality. It is the Kingdom of God we are called to build and the church belongs to Christ.

b. Bless

We are blessed to be a blessing. I pray that we will have the humility to go to the weak, the hungry, the immigrant workers, the economic outcasts and the ordinary folk. That we will go the market place and follow God in these places, seeking to be a people of blessing to our communities.

I noticed some of you have heard of Roy Godwin and read his book *The Grace Outpouring*⁶ which is a captivating account of spiritual renewal on a Welsh hillside of Ffald-y-Brenin as God has drawn thousands of seekers to this converted hill-farm with a tangible presence of healing and power.

What could this look like in our context?

⁶ <https://www.amazon.com/Grace-Outpouring-Becoming-People-Blessing/dp/0781408466>

Roy suggests one way of being a blessing is to start local houses of prayer where two or three people commit to adopt a small local area for Jesus. They then pray regularly for the breaking in of the Kingdom of God as they proclaim blessings and play their part in its release through their life and witness. The following questions are used as a guide in this process.

- Who or what is God putting in front of you that you can affirm and bless?
- Who is God putting in front of you to whom you can show mercy?
- Who is God putting in front of you with whom you can share the Gospel of the kingdom?
- What opportunity is God opening up for you as a group, to declare the good news of the kingdom in your area?
- Who is God putting in front of you whom you could invite to come and join with you?

I read in this year's Year Book of God encounters as folk in Cobden-Runanga parish ran a prayer walk in their community due to rise in tension, vandalism and fear that people were experiencing. That's great! What strongholds do you sense in your community that you could gather prayer around?

I understand a few years ago the Synod in Picton split into groups and walked the streets praying blessing, and bishop and others went up a hill and prayed over the town.

Grateful for all we have in Christ, may we have confidence to know that he wants his grace to flow through us to others.

Next year, I will be calling the diocese to a season of prayer and fasting.

c. Bold - Dream Bigger

Bishop Oscar challenged me and us during the ordination service to be bold. The following passage from Isaiah has been on my mind for the last couple of months.

‘Enlarge the place of your tent, stretch your tent curtains wide, do not hold back; lengthen your cords, strengthen your stakes.’ – Isaiah 54:2

Things were looking pretty hopeless for Israel. Exiled, disconnected from the Promised Land, it seemed God had abandoned them forever. But then God speaks, telling them to lift up their eyes and increase their vision.

When things are looking despairing, it’s tempting to simply consolidate what you have, avoid rocking the boat and look inward. The needs around us can feel overwhelming and dragging us to be inward-looking. Yet it’s precisely at this moment that I sense God challenging us to enlarge our tents, to dream bigger, to lift up our eyes and embrace his greater vision.

Although looking at the parish statistics might be a sobering exercise, I would like to encourage us to look not at what we don’t have, but what we do have. We have people gathering each week, serving, giving and engaging in a variety of ministry engagements across our diocese- and a God who tells us ‘no eye has seen, no ear has heard what God has prepared for those who love him’⁷.

Rather than just maintaining what we’ve got, could we raise our expectations and consider thinking of ways we can grow, expand and multiply?

I’m believing God that we will plant 10 new Churches in 10 years and that existing congregations will continue to grow and flourish. I will be challenging some parishes to consider planting. I have no plans to ‘close’ churches unless doing so helps us reach more people with the good news and plant more churches. Over the next 12 months I hope to hear from you the dreams God is laying on your hearts as parishes/ministry units and to work with a team to come up with a growth plan that I can present to you next year.

⁷ | Cor 2:9

Can I invite us to be bold and to experiment, try new ideas, develop structures that are nimble and flexible and to invest resources for growth rather than maintenance?

My prayer is that we will recognize this incredible moment to re-imagine mission so that future generations will witness to our great God and saviour Jesus Christ!

May we not rob God of his glory by the smallness of our vision.

It is the Spirit of God that empowers us and gives us boldness. Boldness to dream and to go on an adventure with Him.

May we know the outpouring of His grace in this new season.

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.⁸

Bishop Steve Maina
11 October 2019

⁸ Rom 15:13

Questions for Group Discussion

1. As you think about God's mission and look around the diocese what are you grateful for?
2. Where are you seeing the 'fields ripe for harvest' in your context?
3. What do you think is required to bring in the harvest?