

THE DIOCESE OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
The Anglican Church of Canada

6 January, 2011
The Feast of the Epiphany

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Grace and peace be with you. Amen.

"We have seen his star in the East, and have come to worship him." (Matthew 2:2)

Over the past several years our focus as a Diocese has been the transformation of our minds as we have sought the Will of God for us as a Church on these Islands. We have worked on a reconfiguration of our Diocesan structure and looked for ways to use the material resources at our disposal in better ways. Some Canon Law has been changed, some offices, committees, and boards have been reduced. Staffing has been reduced and methods for the more efficient provision of Diocesan services has been brought about.

All parishes have been challenged to enter into discussion with neighbouring parishes to discover ways in which we can work more closely together in proclaiming the Good News of God in Christ in a world where the Spirit of God moves in astounding ways. Some parishes have been directed by Synod to regroup in order that an energetic proclamation of God's mighty power to transform people and situations might be seen, and lived out among us in renewed and stimulating ways. This process has not been neat, nor has it been without its frustrations. In some situations the process has been an abject failure as people have refused to look beyond their own limited senses of vision into the light of the unknown. The process has, however, been exciting and I am sensing renewed energies in people who continue to walk on in faith.

All in all, the past several years have seen us engaged in tasks of what The Preacher, in Ecclesiastes 3, calls, plucking up, killing, and breaking down. Colonial models of Church

and mission have to be eliminated as much as possible. Seeing our church buildings as museums and spiritual country clubs and the clergy as private chaplains to people of mainly British origin are no longer acceptable reasons for our existence. This experience has been a negative and hurtful time for many of us, but, even though the process is not yet complete, it is time to turn our focus to what The Preacher calls, planting, healing, and building up.

Just as Jesus invited people of almost 2,000 years ago to journey with Him, so we today are invited to journey with Christ. Whether we are responding to, "Follow me" or to, "Take up your cross and follow me" or to, "Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves" the call is there. Christ's is not a call that echoes through the ages, it is a call that is uttered in every age to individuals. Each response to Christ's call must also be an individual response.

The singularity of the summons of Christ is constant but the variations of that summons are numerous. In nature the summons may appear to us through a sunset of glowing colour, a mountain vista or prairie sky, or in valley mist infused with a dawn's golden light; it may be heard through texts of scripture, a hymn or a piece of poetry; a liturgical text, a rite or a ceremonial action may be used as a method of call. Prayer, meditation, or contemplation may be instruments of presenting Christ's call, or it might be found in the voice of a neighbour, family member, or friend; it may be heard as the result of an act of social justice; or through a glimpse at a need in society. Christ's call, Christ's invitation to life, is issued and we are to respond in positive ways.

I am calling the members of the Diocese of British Columbia to a renewed awareness of God's call to us. Over the next 18 (eighteen) months I urge every Parish of the Diocese to engage in two things:

1. In seeking answers to the question, "Because I believe God is active in the world and is calling us to life in Himself, how might I/we proclaim that Good News more creatively and invitingly?"
and,
2. In taking part in an old-fashioned 3- to 5- day Parish Mission for the renewal and building up of the Church in this Diocese.

Focussed conversations during Coffee Fellowship following worship, a series of discussion groups in which prayer is offered and ideas shared, Bible Studies etc., might be ways in which engagement #1 might be handled.

Engaging a Parish Missioner or sharing with a neighbouring parish or parishes to do so, then advertising, inviting, and engaging others in a process of renewal and growth would be how engagement #2 might be developed.

Enveloping the whole coming time in a strengthening "Shawl of Prayer" must be our primary activity as we engage in these things.

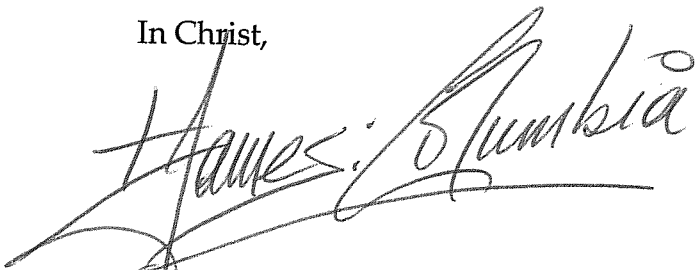
In March of 2010, our Synod adopted a resolution agreeing in principle with the report of the Transformation Team and naming the faith we hold as we engage in this process of transformation. In part it reads, ". . . encouraging conversion toward a new emphasis on Mission and life-changing growth in the name of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and on developing new ways of being and doing church, while honouring the best of Anglican Tradition." This Act of Synod grounds us in those ancient mysteries of the great truths of faith that are tested, questioned, and interpreted by every generation. We must remember our joyous responsibility both to proclaim those mysteries and to invite others to join us in living them out.

I believe that God is urging us to respond in renewed and vital ways to the Great Commission of Christ found recorded in Matthew's Gospel, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (*Matthew 28:19 + 20*)

Go. Make. Baptize. Teach. Remember. A Great Commission indeed, but a daunting task! Yes, it is a daunting task, until we remember that it was only 11 men who heard those words. Their faith inspired them. The Holy Spirit poured upon them at Pentecost emboldened them. Apostolic fellowship united them. The Eucharistic Mysteries fed them. ***Go. Make. Baptize. Teach. Remember.*** A "Great" Commission indeed!

May God continue to guide, strengthen, and call us as the 'star rising in the east leads us to the worship of Him.'

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "James A.J. Cowan". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name of the signatory.

The Right Reverend James A.J. Cowan
Bishop of British Columbia