

Bishop's Charge to Synod Nelson 2010

I want to begin this charge to Synod by reading from Paul's letter to the Ephesians, chapter 1, and verses 15-23.

'I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that can be invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.'



The final phrase in this passage has to be one of the most powerful reflections on the church – *the body of Christ, the fullness of Christ who fills everything in every way.*

Commentators on this passage have four or five contrasting views on who and what 'fullness' and 'filling' actually refers to, but they all still agree that the passage describes both the unique 'calling' and the incredible potential of the church or, if you prefer, its identity and vision (two sides of the one coin).

Which made me think of an old parable:

At the edge of the woods, near a small farm, a baby eagle fell out of the nest. The farmer found the eagle, and thinking it was one of his own, brought him to the chicken coop with his other chickens. As time passed, the baby eagle grew up learning to do what chickens do. He clucked, he strutted around the coop pecking at the corn and even tried his voice at the morning wake-up call.

A neighbor came to visit his friend the chicken farmer. He was surprised to see the eagle strutting around the chicken coop, pecking at the ground, and acting like a chicken. The farmer explained to him that he had brought the bird to the coop as a chick and only later discovered that it was an eagle. He further told his friend that since the bird had been raised a chicken that the bird actually believed himself to be a chicken.

The neighbor knew there was more to this noble bird than his behavior showed as a chicken. He was born an eagle and had the heart of an eagle, and nothing could change that.

The neighbor reached down and lifted the eagle onto the fence surrounding the chicken coop and said, "Eagle, you are an eagle. Stretch your wings and fly." But the eagle looked blankly at the man and clucked. He jumped off the fence and continued doing what chickens do. The farmer was satisfied. "I told you - he thinks he's a chicken," he said.

The neighbor couldn't sleep that night and returned the next day to convince the farmer that the eagle was born for something greater. The man took the eagle from the dirty coop and carried him to the top of the farmhouse. Setting the bird down on the roof, the neighbor spoke to him: "Eagle, you are an eagle. You therefore belong to the sky and not to the earth. Stretch your wings and fly." The large bird blinked at the man, clucked, and then jumped down into the chicken coop.

After another restless night, the friend returned the next morning to the chicken farm and took the eagle and the farmer away from the chicken coop to the foot of a high mountain. They couldn't see the farm or the chicken coop from this great height. The man lifted the eagle on his outstretched arm and pointed high into the sky where the bright sun was beckoning above. He spoke: "Eagle, you are an eagle! You therefore belong to the sky and not to the earth. Stretch your wings and fly." This time the eagle stared skyward into the bright sun, straightened his large body, and stretched his massive wings. His wings moved, slowly at first, then surely and powerfully, and then with the mighty screech of an eagle, he flew....

He was born an eagle; he had all the potential of the eagle; he was an eagle. But he was content to strut around the hen coop pecking at the corn because that was all he knew. Launching him off the fence or the roof of the farmhouse didn't do anything – he was quickly back in the coop, pecking the corn.

It wasn't until he was taken away from the hen coop and saw what he had been created for that he began to soar.

The difference was vision.

And the passage from Ephesians is all about identity and vision: a vision for the church that Paul describes with such clarity.

I get really disappointed when I see Christians (and churches) who are content to peck around in the chicken coop; majoring on the minors; grizzling over the length of the service or the colour of the Vicar's shoes; falling out of fellowship because 'their child wasn't nice to my one'; procrastinating about stained glass windows or carpet or sound systems; gossiping about the speck in someone's eye, or the time it takes to get through communion.....

I get deeply disappointed when the church spends its time majoring on the minors because it points to an inability (or unwillingness) to embrace the vision that God has for His church.

This is nothing new.

Even before he led the Israelite people out of Egypt, God gave them a vision of the land he was leading them to. (Exodus 13) But within a few days of their escape the people were 'pecking at the corn' - complaining; the water was undrinkable (Exodus 15:23-24), there wasn't enough food (Exodus 16:3-4), they wanted meat, not manna (Numbers 4-6), Moses leadership wasn't consultative or inclusive enough (Numbers 12:1-2), the barriers to the promised land were too big (Numbers 14:1), It was taking too long – they weren't seeing the promises (Numbers 21:4).

It just about wiped Moses out; he despaired of this 'stiff-necked' people.

His response was to recast the vision – to tell them again and again what God's plan and promise was (and is) for his chosen people.

Bringing it a bit closer to home; without a clear sense of what God's vision is for his church a strategic plan, such as we have, will be no more than a re-ordering or re-focusing of life in the chicken coop!

Our strategic plan will govern and focus our life as a Diocese.

But it is the *vision* that lies behind the strategic plan that gives us this life in the first place. Unless we are really clear about what it is that God has called us to, our strategic plan will simply be a task list to be ticked off, rather than a means of more fully realizing our identity and our calling.

The church, which is His body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

Leading into this passage Paul writes:

'I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know;

- *the hope to which he has called you;*
- *the riches of his glorious inheritance in his people, and*
- *His incomparably great power for us who believe.'*

When was the last time this passage was preached on as vision for the church?

I wish I had the time to tease out these three powerful images but can I ask you to imagine what this Synod would be like; what our parishes would be like if we had a very clear understanding of 'the hope to which he has *called* us, the riches of his glorious inheritance *in* us and his incomparably great power *for* us.'

Western Christianity has focused so much on the relatively recent phenomenon of a 'personal' Christianity that it has left the church with a crisis of vision. We're not that clear about who we are and why we are.

I sense that vacuum within our church – we're just pecking around in the chicken coop when we could be flying with the eagles.

And if vision is not clearly articulated, owned and embraced, then several things happen:

- There is an overemphasis on form and structure – denominational identity becomes the vision.
- Consumer Christianity is able to flourish – the biblical emphasis on 'we' gets swamped by the contemporary preoccupation with 'me!'
- Churches become 'program-driven and task-focused – busyness is synonymous with effectiveness!

Just deviating for a few moments; during the week Rev. Martin Harrison drew my attention to a very moving article 'To serve is to suffer' written by Ajith Fernando for the upcoming Lausanne Conference in Cape Town. In this article he writes this:

'When people leave a church because they do not fit the program, it communicates a deadly message: that our commitment is to the work and not to the person; that our unity is primarily in the work and not in Christ and the gospel. The sad result is that Christians do not have the security of a community that will stay by them no matter what happens. They become shallow individuals, never having true fellowship and moving from group to group. Churches committed to programs can grow numerically, but they don't nurture biblical Christians who understand the implications of belonging to the body of Christ.'

It's all about vision.

There are exciting activities happening in every region of the Diocese.

Most churches have clear mission statements and many others are developing Mission Action Plans and this is all very positive.

Some parishes have a strong teaching ministry; others focus on excellence in worship. Some are looking for new and creative ways to engage with their local community and all of this is great stuff and really important and I wouldn't want to change any of it.

But this is all about 'doing' and unless we have a correspondingly clear sense of 'being' we'll begin (or continue) to feel tired and restless – both individually and corporately.

One parish describes themselves as 'a rescue station' and this is a statement of vision because it describes how they understand what it means to be the Body of Christ.

I am going to resist the temptation to define our vision - I think the passage from Ephesians that I chose to start with, expresses something of my vision for the church.

But some years ago we made a conscious decision as a Diocese to have the term 'the local church' refer to each individual parish. This is totally out of step with the Anglican Communion world-wide which understands 'the local church' to mean the Diocese.

And while I strongly endorse that, we need to grab the vision of what it means to belong to something bigger than ourselves and the possibilities of that – either regionally or as a Diocese.

However, I believe that the development and articulation of a clear sense of vision must remain with the local church and each parish needs to express their own vision because of our different contexts. It may not be appropriate to have the same vision as the parish mentioned a few moments ago.

But it needs to happen because many places have totally lost a sense of identity: We've lost a sense of what it means to be Anglican (many places feel almost embarrassed to use the term); But we have also lost a sense of what it means to be the Church. I want to suggest that once we have reclaimed the latter, the former will fall into place!

Very few parishes have any excitement at all about what it means to be the Body of Christ – and without that excitement there will be little commitment to mission.

What does it mean to be the Church?

How clearly would your parish be able to answer that question?

Maybe a journey through Paul's letter to the Ephesians looking at all the references to 'Church' could be a starting point.

Maybe a study of Romans chapter 12 to the end might also help!

How about an exegesis of John 17 or an overview of community from Genesis to Revelation.

Or what about looking up 'Church' in the catechism or in the Book of Common Prayer – you might be surprised what you find – particularly if you put Acts 2:42-47 alongside it.

What about a study on David Watson's book 'I believe in the Church.'

My charge to Synod and my commitment as Bishop is very simple: to ensure that every parish has a **vision** – a very clear picture - of who they are as the Church of God; the Body of Christ; the Bride of Christ.

And then let that vision empower our ministry and our mission – and give life to the outworking of our strategic plan.

Okay, having set this foundation I want to refer briefly to the strategic plan which was presented to Synod last year.

We didn't really have the time to discuss it during Synod which was something of a disappointment. As I mentioned at the time, it was a strategic plan for the Diocese that was put together after months of prayer and reflection and discussion by the Diocesan Ministry Team

and Standing Committee but it reflects the areas that I, as Bishop, believe to be a critical focus for our growth as a Diocese over the next four years (as a development of our vision).

A strategic plan should be the point of reference for all the discussions we have, and decisions we make, at Synod.

And because of this I make absolutely no apologies for reminding Synod of the five priorities identified in our strategic plan:

Developing Leaders.

We want to ‘develop confident, creative and spiritually healthy leaders across the diocese with a clear understanding of the gospel, discipleship and ministry as participating in the mission of God, reflecting a diversity of leadership styles and modes as appropriate to a range of ministry contexts, challenges and needs.’

Or, to nail it down a little more specifically as a strategic outcome:

In five years we want to see;

- a. The identification, nurture and formation of a new generation of leaders (both lay and ordained) for fresh and reinvigorating ministry initiatives.
- b. Existing leaders actively embracing opportunities to grow professionally in ministry with a clear sense of mission and outreach.

Firstly: new leaders.

The growth of Bishopdale Theological College; the development of a new structure for Post Ordination Ministry Development; the clarification of the discernment processes for ordination and the work we are currently doing to clearly define the uniqueness of ordination to the diaconate compared to that of the Priesthood are all totally focused on this strategic priority.

Within the next few months the first of our foundation students will be graduating with either a Bachelor of Theology or a Bachelor of Ministry, and three of those students, Zane Elliott, Nathaniel Petterson and Di Griffin have already been ordained.

We do have a new generation of leaders here in the Diocese and the challenge is to create the places and spaces where their ministries can be empowered and released.

One of the difficult decisions that flows from this is the decision to be more strategic in the distribution of discretionary funding, which must be used for mission rather than maintenance.

But there is another challenge that needs to be placed before every single parish. Where are the emerging leaders within our parishes who are being mentored and nurtured and prepared for ministry? How intentional and proactive are clergy and lay-leaders in identifying and shoulder-tapping young men and women – potential leaders - and sowing into them a vision for ministry?

I think we’re well behind the eight ball on this one. Other churches are far better at this than we are and, dare I say it, more biblical, and we see the fruit of that intentionality.

Secondly: the support and development of existing leaders.

The world has changed;

Ministry has changed;

The expectations upon those in leadership has changed.

On the one hand there is all the talk about new initiatives and fresh expressions.

Yet on the other hand there are the gate-keepers who don’t want anything to change.

On the one hand we want to see people growing deeper in Christ;

On the other hand the church is a rescue station' for broken people.

This is the reality we live with daily.

We are compared to the preacher that was on early morning TV or the brilliant music team from the church just down the road.

It's tough and it's tiring.

Therefore it's more important than ever before that all those in ministry leadership are receiving good supervision, but are also honest in that supervision.

New structures of support are being developed but they're only as good as the commitment to them and the willingness to be open and honest within them.

Dave Pritchard is the Principal of Hope School and the prime motivator behind the development of our peer support groups which are modeled on the support groups that school principals belong to as part of their professional development. Late last week he emailed this to me:

'My Professional Learning group consists of 6 people who are principals in a variety of schools. We meet 6 times a year and everyone schedules the dates and gives attendance a very high priority because this is the group where we 'let off steam,' share difficulties and look for solutions from our colleagues, in short we learn off and support each other. Frequently what is problematic and difficult for one member, to another a solution may be obvious, as they have been down that or a similar road previously. Professional learning together either from a reading, a video clip or a web site helps to keep us up with the pace and be effective leaders in our work places and is a major component in our PD. Our group took a while to get going, membership has changed a little over time, but to each of the members it is something of a life line.'

While we still have some fine-tuning to do to see how this fits in with Regional Deaneries etc, I am committed to the development of these groups for the development of our leaders.

There is another dimension of leadership that we need briefly to consider:

Earlier in this charge I referred to an article written by the Sri Lankan Pastor and Scholar, Ajith Fernando. In another part of this article he describes something of the sacrifice and struggles of leadership within the Kingdom of God:

'Vocational fulfillment in the kingdom of God has a distinct character, different from vocational fulfillment in society. Jesus said, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work" (John 4:34, ESV, used throughout). If we are doing God's will, we are happy and fulfilled. But for Jesus, and for us, doing God's will includes the Cross. The Cross must be an essential element in our definition of vocational fulfillment.

Young Christian workers who come back to Sri Lanka after studying in the West struggle with this. They are highly qualified, but our poor nation cannot afford to give them the recognition they think their qualifications deserve. They cannot use their gifts to the fullest because we cannot afford pure specialists. They struggle with frustration. Some end up leaving the country after a few years. Some start their own organizations so as to fulfill their "vision." Others become consultants, giving expert training and advice in their specialized field. Others pay the price of identifying with our people and ultimately have a deep impact on the nation.

I try to tell these students that their frustration could be the means to developing penetrating insight. I explain that people like John Calvin and Martin Luther had a dizzying variety of

responsibilities, so that they could only use their gifts in the fog of fatigue. Yet the fruits of their labor as leaders and writers still bless the church.

Paul's theology emphasized the need to endure frustration patiently as we live in a fallen world awaiting the redemption of creation. Paul said that we groan because of this frustration (Rom. 8:18-27). I believe we fail to include this frustration in our understanding of vocational fulfillment. A church that has a wrong understanding of fulfillment for its workers will certainly become sick. This may be one reason why the church contains so much shallowness. We have measured success by the standards of the world and fail to challenge the world with the radically different biblical way to fulfillment.

We want to 'develop confident, creative and spiritually healthy leaders across the diocese with a clear understanding of the gospel, discipleship and ministry as participating in the mission of God, reflecting a diversity of leadership styles and modes as appropriate to a range of ministry contexts, challenges and needs.'

Okay – I've spent enough time on that one....

Growing Disciples:

Our strategic intent is to create a culture within our churches that encourages a selfless and obedient lifestyle amongst those who desire to follow Christ.

And again, the more specific outcome is to see a greater commitment to, and involvement in, the ministry and mission of the church and increasing evidence of Christ like character.

The Great Commission is the commission to 'make disciples' and I want to attempt a definition of discipleship: *A follower of Jesus Christ who is living in Christ and is daily growing more like Christ.*

But the question that I have always struggled with is how we measure our growth as a disciple of Christ!

Is it the accumulation of biblical knowledge or is it defined by the number of courses or programs we have attended?

Has it got something to do with 'speaking in tongues' or one of the other spiritual gifts?

I'm not trying to be flippant about these things – but over the years there have been 'discipleship programs' that have specifically focused on one or other of these attributes.

John 15:8 says, *'This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.'*

It is not something that can be measured!

Discipleship is the *formation* of 'Christlikeness' – which will be most clearly visible in such characteristics as the 'fruit of the Spirit' defined by Paul in his letter to the Galatians.

But this can't be confined to a series of boxes that can be ticked to mark our spiritual growth, despite Rick Warren's best attempts to do so in the purpose driven life!

Discipleship is a life-time journey and happens most effectively within a permission-giving, unconditionally loving, mutually accountable community of faith.

In other words – the church; if our vision for the church is big enough and clear enough.

It's all about vision!

Empowering Youth and Children:

Our strategic intent is to ensure that every parish is aware of the unique spirituality of children, youth and young adults and looks for appropriate and strategic ways of responding.

Luke Shaw's synod sermon cast a vision for ministry to youth so I want to focus these few comments on our ministry to children.

In my daily Bible readings the other morning I read Psalm 78.

*'O my people, listen to my instructions.
Open your ears to what I am saying,
for I will speak to you in a parable.
I will teach you hidden lessons from our past—
stories we have heard and known,
stories our ancestors handed down to us.
We will not hide these truths from our children;
we will tell the next generation
about the glorious deeds of the Lord,
about his power and his mighty wonders.
For he issued his laws to Jacob;
he gave his instructions to Israel.
He commanded our ancestors
to teach them to their children,
so the next generation might know them—
even the children not yet born—
and they in turn will teach their own children.
So each generation should set its hope anew on God,
not forgetting his glorious miracles
and obeying his commands....'*

Some months ago I wrote in the margin of this psalm – 'a mandate for children's ministry.'

You know, I don't know how often I hear the cliché; '*children (or youth) aren't the church of tomorrow – they're the church of today!*' and I know we believe it.

But I'm not sure that our practice reflects our belief.

I am thrilled that we have two or three vibrant children's ministries happening within the Diocese and I want to acknowledge the work of Susie Schruer who has been employed in a part-time capacity this year to review our children's ministries.

Can I draw your attention in particular to her report and the comment she makes that the most exciting thing she has discovered in her journey around the Diocese is the number of enthusiastic people - in almost every parish in the Diocese - who have a vision for ministry to children. Many new initiatives are being started with the focus on ministry to children.

The wiring is all there.

But many of these same people express a disappointment that ministry to children often feels like a bit of an add-on to the *real* ministry of the church and not a core part of the mission of the church with either a budget, or a core of willing volunteers, that reflects that commitment.

It is part of our strategic plan to change that culture.

In the budget before Synod there is provision for a new part-time position developing our ministry to children.

Can I ask you to warmly endorse this initiative.

However this is ministry *to* children. There is also the ministry *of* children which I believe is every bit as important and probably even more of a challenge to the culture of our churches. I long to see a church where theological scholarship and childlike simplicity are both embraced in our times of worship – where children are encouraged to use their spiritual gifts within the life of the church – unless of course passages such as Matthew 19:14 mean something other than what they seem to imply.

Ministry *to* and ministry *of* children. Children and youth *are* the church of today. My dream is that in four years time a significant number of our parishes might have begun to reflect that reality in their life and worship.

Becoming Missional.

It's something we've heard a great deal about this year and was the focus of a recent conference that most of our clergy attended in Christchurch.

I want to encourage our Diocese to embrace the 'mixed economy' framework of missional development; building both attractional churches (churches that attract new believers through the vibrancy of their life and vision) and fresh expressions of church.

But, like all good initiatives, it risks becoming the latest 'fad' or the new 'cure-all' for the problems facing the Church.

That's why I was thrilled that Bishop Graham Cray began the conference in Christchurch with a theology of mission that drew us back to mission as the core business of the church in response to our missionary God.

It is for this reason and on this foundation that our fourth strategic intent is that 'in four years every ministry unit will be thinking missionally.'

However, I am under no illusions that this is easier said than done because it does imply a major change of culture within churches that are traditionally formed and organized to maintain existing structures and ways of doing things.

But I am intensely aware, and I want Synod to be aware, of the consequences of doing nothing. Although the more specific outcome is to develop new initiatives within each deanery, I am concerned that the change of culture be the focus of this particular strategic priority because of the danger of jumping on fresh expression bandwagons without asking the appropriate questions.

One little quote from Jim Belcher's book 'Deep Church:'

The church always faces the twin dangers of cultural captivity and cultural irrelevance.

Raising Profile of our Public Witness:

The final priority in our strategic plan.

If the Christian Churches through Aotearoa / New Zealand pulled the plug on the amount of social services and caring ministries exercised through our church agencies or local churches our society would be in absolute crisis.

It was the church that established the first public schools and the first hospitals. Before it became big business it was the church that formed and ran homes and hospitals that cared for the elderly. It was the church that ran drug rehabs; it is the church that runs the night shelters and the food-banks and many of the family-care centres.

Within our Diocese in the last year we have spent tens of thousands of dollars on a huge range of caring initiatives.

And then there are the hundreds of hours every week when a parishioner quietly reaches out in love to a neighbor.

So I get really wound up when the influence and ministry of the church is dismissed or ignored by the society within which we live and minister.

Within the framework of Jesus command to not let the left hand know what the right hand is doing when ministering in the name of Jesus; our final priority is to ensure our communities know that the Nelson Diocese cares!

Developing Leaders, Growing Disciples, Empowering Youth and Children, Becoming Missional; Raising Profile. These are the key priorities for the next four years as part of our strategic plan. Which means it is the focus and dream of the Bishop and the Diocesan Ministry Team and, I hope, will provide springboard for discussion and action within parishes and Regional Deaneries.

But I stress again that it must flow from our vision and not be a substitute for vision.

So in conclusion

'I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe.'

Pecking at corn in the chicken coop or flying with eagles?