

**Charge to Synod  
Diocese of Nelson  
September 2007.**



Greetings.

In the name of our God, who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

I feel very humbled to be standing here as your Bishop - and certainly very inadequate. In the last year my world and my ministry have been turned upside down by what you discerned to be the call of God.

Bishop Derek was a very special man and left a huge legacy here in this Diocese.

He and Alice lived the faith they profess and consequently touched and inspired so many people.

In the years I acted as his Vicar-General I came to see not only his hopes and dreams, but also his fears and struggles and it only made me respect him more.

Like so many of you, I am here in this Diocese because Bishop Derek searched me out. He had that ability to encourage and to see the potential that I didn't necessarily see. He always had faith in people.

At the ordination service last October - his final service as Bishop I was profoundly moved as he knelt at the altar steps and handed me (as Vicar General) his ceremonial Bishop's staff, to lay upon the Lord's table.

A month ago, Hilary and I spent a week with Derek and Alice in Cairo watching their ministry continue back in a part of the world that was so formative for them and I look forward to remaining in a very special and unique partnership with them.

One of the great joys of being Bishop has been to join a very special team at the Anglican Centre.

Some years ago we made a major paradigm shift to see the centre as a servant to the parishes and not (as was sometimes perceived) the other way around.

In the Anglican Communion the Bishop is the point of unity for the Diocese and it was really interesting to hear many of the Bishops who were at the recent conference in Oxford referring to the Diocese when talking about the local church. When we talk about the local church we think about each individual parish.

And the staff at the Anglican centre are passionately committed to the outworking of that concept. We are very blessed by every single one of them on both the admin team and the ministry team.

Although the Bishop is given a unique responsibility as a consequence of the ordination I am very keen to continue to develop a shared episcopacy that is evidenced in a team ministry. There is a long way to go in working this out, but I hope that we have started that journey.

Together we have planned a five year strategy for the Diocese that has been partially inspired by the '40 days of purpose.'

For each of the next five years we will focus on one of the five key purposes of God for his church.

And next year we will begin with worship.  
Watch this space!

In the year since our last Synod we have lost some deeply loved members of our Diocese. There are too many names to mention in this report, but an appendix to it is lying on the tables of Synod and I would ask that we pause for a few moments and remember them in silence giving thanks to God for their life and witness.

And finally in these introductory comments I want to acknowledge you as Synod members of this Diocese and thank you for your commitment to the vision of our Diocese.

I simply say thank-you for the faith and trust you have placed in me and for the overwhelming support expressed at the time of my - rather different - ordination!

Particularly to my brother and sister clergy who warmly embraced my desire to have a series of Regional Retreats early in my time as Bishop and whose support and affirmation I sincerely value.

Bishop Philip Richardson encouraged me, at the end of the electoral synod to take six months before heading away on Study leave because, as he said, I would then have some idea of the questions to ask.

It seemed like good advice at the time.

These two months away occurred at a time when I was just getting routines and systems in place. And it almost feels as though I have to start all over.

It was a special time away and I specially thank the ministry team and Robin Kingston (my Vicar-General) who enabled Hilary and me to take this time.

What a time to be a Bishop!

The world-wide Anglican communion is being torn apart at the seams and it is hard to say whether we are witnessing death throes or birth pangs - or a little bit of both.

And I must confess to becoming rather tired of having my emails clogged up with the latest commentary on the situation from would-be movers and shakers who seem to believe they have some sort of inside ear on what is happening.

After spending a week in Oxford with evangelical leaders, both lay and ordained from round the world, the only certainty I know is that nothing is certain.

It is very much 'watch this space.'

But I am one who does believe and trust in the power of our sovereign God who said that he would build his church and the gates of hell would not prevail against it..

The issues that have brought us to this point of crisis are issues that deeply concern us - as a Diocese that is committed to the truth of God's word.

- The ordination of men and women who are openly living in gay relationships continues both nationally and internationally.
- Apostasy seems to have become something of an art form within the Episcopal Church in America.

And it deeply concerns the huge majority of the Anglican Communion as it deeply concerns us.

However, what we are not unified on, as a Diocese, is how we might respond. I mean, should I go to Lambeth or not?

They are real issues that strike at the heart of our biblical faith. But what does deeply concern me is the way in which the time spent reacting and responding to these issues diverts us away from our mission as a church and, spiritually speaking, I know exactly who is doing the hijacking and who is having a field-day.

I will come back to these issues briefly at the end of this charge but I want to spend the major part of this charge redressing the balance and focussing on our mission.

Over the past two or three years I had an increasing sense of unease that, in seeking to be relevant to the culture in which my parish was planted, I had in fact sold out to that culture.

I sensed that I was helping to birth a new generation of Christians where 'my needs' were of primary importance; a church where a personal relationship with Jesus - and therefore an individualised faith - was more highly valued than any sense of corporate accountability to the mission of the body of Christ.

'Church shopping' had become accepted as a normal characteristic of contemporary Christianity and I responded by trying to package our goods in such a way that those who were 'just looking' would choose to stay and not be attracted by the bargains on offer down the street.

And with all its good intentions, the church growth movement that became very popular in the 80's and 90's, became the driving force behind this new expression of church. Whether we liked it or not - we were dominated by numbers.

I am more convinced than ever that major challenge facing western Christianity today is the rise of this consumer Christianity and its related challenge of what a missional church might be like that grows authentic disciples within this all-pervading consumer culture.

I want us to take these challenges really seriously here in this Diocese. To do so will mean change in the way we do church as well as in the identification and selection of those to be ordained.

To kick off our thinking I want to charge this Synod to think about **Missional Discipleship**.

In presenting this concept, I am drawing extensively on a paper presented by Graham Cray, Bishop of Maidstone, at the recent conference I attended at Wycliffe Hall in Oxford.

Bishop Graham was responding to the same questions and concerns that I had been struggling with since becoming your Bishop and so at the end of his talk I asked him whether I might use his address as the basis of this charge.

Discipleship is the most important long-term priority we face.

Alan Hirsch, in his book 'Shaping of Things to Come' says;  
*'When dealing with discipleship and the related capacity to generate authentic followers of Jesus, we are dealing with that single most crucial factor that will, in*

*the end, determine the quality of the whole. If we fail at this point then we must fail in all the others.'*

There are many exciting 'Fresh Expressions' of church that are arising throughout the church in England and new 'missional' churches in the States.

And the crucial issue each of them will face is - what kind of disciples will they make.

About 12 years ago I came in contact with WillowCreek community church in Chicago and this church had a profound influence upon me.

Its focus on Godly and visionary leadership and its passion for a model of church based on Acts 2:42-47 was inspiring.

Its method of vision-casting and strategic planning brought a clarity of purpose to my ministry.

But its development of 'seeker services' and the associated growth of such clones as 'seeker targeted' or 'seeker sensitive' has had the very opposite influence upon the church. Willow Creek themselves have now done an 'about-face' on this concept recognising that it did not grow mature disciples but a generation of worshippers who came to be entertained and who were unable to take the next step into costly discipleship.

This is perhaps the one issue which the global South and the North have in common - the shallowness of much, so-called, discipleship.

### **1. The purpose of mission is discipleship:**

Making disciples is at the heart of mission.

It is the central command of the 'Great Commission' in Matthew 28

The imperative is to 'make disciples of all nations.'

And this is to be done by *Going, Baptising and Teaching*.

The ones sent to make disciples are themselves disciples.

Again from Alan Hirsch:

*'The founding of the whole Christian movement was initiated through the simple acts of Jesus investing his life and embedding his teachings in his followers and developing them into authentic disciples.'*

The commission they were given on the mountain was not their graduation from discipleship, but the next stage of it. Only disciples can make disciples.

In first century Palestine, potential disciples sought out their hoped for Rabbis.

Jesus, by contrast, called his disciples.

First century disciples stayed with their rabbi until they had advanced sufficiently to be able to attract disciples themselves.

Jesus calls us to lifelong discipleship, which involves helping others to become - not our disciples - but disciples of Jesus.

The question of discipleship and mission begins inescapably with a challenge about the quality of life of those who would make disciples.

Jim Wallis said, *'We have nothing to share with the world other than what we are sharing with each other. We can effect no change in the ways of the world, unless we ourselves are being converted from those ways.'*

The commission in Matthew is not an 'add-on' or a postscript to that Gospel. It is the climax of it.

Disciples are to be taught to obey everything Jesus has commanded throughout the Gospel.

Whether it is the Sermon on the Mount, the teaching on marriage and divorce; the value of children; or the teaching about wealth and the exercise of power.

The whole Gospel becomes a manual for the making of disciples.

We cannot afford to be vocal about some sins and silent about others.

And Paul makes it so clear, in passage after passage that the long-term object of mission is Christ-likeness in every aspect of life.

Missionary churches are not looking for prayers of commitment as much as life-long commitment.

Although the great commission mentions baptism before teaching, there is no hint of the ethical implications of following Christ being introduced at a later stage in the development of a disciple.

Growing as a disciple means learning to do everything that Jesus has taught and this learning may continue for the whole of our lives. But authentic evangelism will also include teaching about the Jesus way of living, otherwise repentance will be hollow.

Evangelism has to begin with ethics, and not treat it as some sort of postscript to commitment.

Discipleship is both the object of mission and provides mission with its integrity.

## **2. The purpose of discipleship is to be a blessing:**

The commission in Matthew *'Go and make disciples of all nations'* is a Christological fulfilment of the commission God gave to Abraham; *'Go and all people will be blessed through you.'*

This is a very positive view of discipleship being for the glory of God and the blessing of others.

*'By this is my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.'*

Graham Tomlin who was here speaking at our leadership conference 2 or 3 years ago writes:

*'Christian goodness or spiritual fitness is developed not primarily for our own sake but for God's and other people's.'*

Discipleship is for the sake of the world because it is for the sake of God's purposes in the world. It is to be world transforming rather than withdrawing from the world. And again this is the missional focus of authentic discipleship.

There is a term that describes the transformation of a society from within and that is *'enculturation.'*

Or, as the Bible describes it, it's about being the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

But to be such a blessing we have to be appropriately distinctive.

And this is where the huge challenge comes in.

Salt that loses its flavour and lights under boxes cannot fulfil the purposes of God.

If I can just take some moments to look at discipleship in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians because much of Paul's teaching in this letter is about being distinctive in order to be a blessing.

His teaching on discipleship takes people on a journey away from personal self-interest to a concern for the interests of others.

And it is based on a clear vision and anticipation of the future Christ has secured through his resurrection.

The hard work of discipleship, witness and service to others is not in vain - although it feels it sometimes!

1 Corinthians 15:58

*'Be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord. Because you know that in the Lord your labour is not in vain.'*

Paul's picture of a missional church might best be described as **Involved Distinctiveness:**

A countercultural community which seeks common ground with its society whenever possible. It is to be involved rather than withdrawn from society.

But they were to be distinct in their morality. (1 Cor. 6:9-11)

*Note in these verses the clear assumption that the Gospel has the power to not only transform our lifestyle, but also our eternal destiny)*

They were to be distinct in their attitude to their rights (1 Cor. 6:12)

Some of the Corinthian Christians were emphasizing their personal rights and freedoms.

Their motto was 'all things are lawful!'

Paul's reply is consistent to them right through this letter:

'But not all things are beneficial' (are a blessing to others)

'I will not be dominated by anything'

'Not all things build up.'

(Which I must add is a term that he uses as often about believers building up non-believers, as about mutually building up one another within the church!)

In Galatians 5:13 he tells us that real freedom - Christian freedom - is a freedom **from** self-indulgence and **for** the love of our neighbour.

They were to be distinct as a visible alternative community (1 Cor. 3:16)

They are 'God's temple.'

*Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?'*

They were a distinctive community but at the same time they were seeking common ground as a way to interact with their society such as in the ethics of the popular society.

For example, many of Paul's lists of vices (such as those in 1 Corinthians 5:10-11 and 6:9-10) have parallels with Jewish lists as well as Greek and Roman ones.

His claim is not so much that Christians live by distinctive ethical standards but rather that they we should live up to, and beyond, the ethical standards that others share, but do not follow.

Distinctiveness is never for its own sake. It is so that we might be a blessing!

It is to be a new community that is distinctive but involved.

Sadly we tend to be either one or the other!

### **3. Discipleship in contemporary context.**

Okay, let's bring it back to where the rubber hits the road - the context within which we are called to a missional discipleship.

What is the culture in which we are called to 'involved distinctiveness?'

*Firstly*, it is a society that is structured for individuals. Individualisation has shaped the West.

*Secondly* it is a multi-choice society for which consumerism provides the satellite navigation system and the right to individual choice is the core value.

*Thirdly* it is a constructivist society which has changed its controlling story.

We have moved from believing a story about making the world better, to a story about making ourselves up!

Personal identity, truth and meaning are merely social constructs about which I may exercise my consumer choice.

And such a society makes its disciples just as we do!

David Lyon writes this:

*'Identities are constructed through consuming. Forget the idea that who we are is given by God or achieved through hard work in a calling or a career. We shape our malleable image by what we buy - our clothes, our kitchens, our cars tell the story of who we are - or who we are becoming.'*

And then he adds:

*'And the sad thing is that the everyday challenge of consumerism has yet to be fully acknowledged by most Christian communities.'*

Consumerism is the very antithesis of true Christianity for many reasons:

#### 1. It is Idolatry.

In his book 'anatomy of desire, Christopher Wright describes 'idolatry' as '*things that entice us, things that we fear, things that we trust, things that we need.*' Or as Alan Hirsch describes it: '*Safety, security, comfort, convenience.*'

It is a kind of 'default philosophy for modern life.'

## 2. It offers False Hope.

The seduction of consumerism is the ongoing process that keeps moving us from one consumer choice to another. It is a desire that is not focussed on particular things but rather entices us to go beyond what has been acquired to consider something new.

St Augustine wrote: '*You made us for yourself and our hearts find no peace until they rest in you.*'

Consumer desire mimics the restlessness of our earthly pilgrimage.

And consumerism either makes religion seem irrelevant and unnecessary or it turns it into a consumer experience.

It commits us to 'small gods' which (like those in Terry Pratchett's novel) grow in power as we give ourselves to them.

So, I guess to summarise all of this in one sentence:

Missional Discipleship seeks to grow disciples who are passionately involved in, and engaged with their society and their culture, but whose lives radiate increasing Christ-likeness that is markedly distinct from the individualistic consumerism of our prevailing culture.

I am not as concerned about the size of our churches as I am about the authenticity of disciples that we are creating.

I want to suggest that much of the failure of the church in the West is reflected in the lives of good men and women who seem to have more in common with the prevailing culture than the way of Christ.

This charge to Synod comes with a challenge to become a missional church.

At one level it may mean some spiritual stock-taking as we look at all the programmes and activities we offer in our local churches and ask how effective they are, or what role they play, in the development of missional discipleship.

And then being willing to close down any activities that are consuming time and resources that run counter to this mission.

At another level it may mean looking for ways of sustaining and growing new models or expressions of church that do engage with, but offer a visible alternative to the surrounding culture.

At yet another level it affirms our development of Bishopdale Theological College with its strong foundational statement that reflects a passion for missional discipleship within those being trained theologically for ministry both lay and ordained.

And finally it also encourages us to personal self examination as we reflect on our own growth as a disciple of Christ.

When people look at me do they see just another clone of the culture - am I any different from the world around me?

Or do they see something of the character of Jesus?

At whatever level we engage with the question within our own personal and parish situations, I am asking this Synod to take the challenge seriously.

I believe the issue of 'missional discipleship' is the pressing issue facing the church in the West today and as your Bishop I want to make it our core issue.

The world-wide Anglican communion *is* at a point of crisis.

The deadline given by the Primates to the Episcopal Church in America is fast approaching and all indications are that they will continue to 'thumb their nose' at the huge majority of Anglicans who hold to a conservative and orthodox view of scripture.

Their statements thus far have led the Ugandan, Nigerian and Rwandan churches to decline the Archbishop of Canterbury's invitation to attend Lambeth next year. And I sincerely respect their decision.

I am disappointed however, that they have taken such action so soon. The reason why the liberal church has gained so much power of the past few years is because the evangelicals have consistently withdrawn from engagement. If Lambeth goes ahead without Uganda, Nigeria and Kenya, we have given the ball to the opposition metaphorically.

I have joined three of my Episcopal colleagues from Northern Ireland in writing to the Archbishop of Canterbury, thanking him for the invitation to attend Lambeth 2008 and for all the work that has already gone into the planning of this gathering.

But we have asked if we might defer our acceptance until we see what answer the Episcopal Church makes to the Primates' Dar-e-Salaam ultimatum.

If they continue in their intransigence, and if the invitation to attend Lambeth is still extended to them, then I shall join many other Bishops in declining the invitation to attend. And I shall join my Irish colleagues in not attending any alternative to Lambeth that may be set up.

In the last few days an e-mail was forwarded to me that contained Richard Kew's farewell to the American Church as he prepares to take up a new position in Oxford. It is a deeply moving letter.

He writes this:

*'As an evangelical and catholic Christian, fragmentation does not seem the right way forward, but I am not sure what actually is appropriate. I guess that for me the jury is still out on what is happening. This is a time perhaps when we need to combine those biblical values of faithfulness and patience, prayerfully waiting to see where God might guide us - and guide us he certainly will.'*

I still believe that the process toward a covenant that was set up by the Primates at Dromantine is the appropriate way forward and I intend to continue as a partner in that process.

The drafts that have been circulated for our discussion at Oxford were strongly scriptural and were a reflection of our historical and orthodox faith.

As I said at the beginning of this charge I do believe and trust in the power of a sovereign God who will have his way in his church.

One or two Bishops in New Zealand will push the boundaries with respect to the ordination of gay people who are living in same-sex relationships.

And I will continue to express our deep disappointment and uphold our own Diocesan position and the theological underpinning of that position.

These actions will continue to colour us by association in the eyes of some but we must be so careful not to become what we hate, but get on with the mission that God has challenged us to as a Diocese.

This must be our focus.

I want to finish this charge by repeating Ben Kwashi's story that he very humbly shared with us at Oxford. I told the story in a recent edition of the witness and many of you have probably read it on one of the many e'mail blogs.

Ben is not a big man but he has a huge heart and a dynamic enthusiasm for the Gospel.

He is the international chairman of SOMA and is the Bishop of Joss in Northern Nigeria - an area that has strong Islamic militancy.

Last year Ben was away from home, attending a wedding when he received a phone call from his wife who was terrified because there was a gang of young people trying to break into their home. It was 2 o'clock in the morning

He told her to hang up and he would immediately try to call someone back in Joss who might go straight around.

It was two hours before he could raise anyone who was willing to go.

By that time, this gang of militants had broken into his home, severely injuring the guard. They violated Bishop Ben's wife and beat her for information on the whereabouts of her husband.

Fortunately no-one was killed and Gloria's injuries - particularly to her sight - have been treated.

Then Bishop Ben spoke to us about his passion for and commitment to the Gospel of Christ. He believes that he is living on borrowed time and that he will be called to give his life (literally) for the sake of the Gospel.

Then he looked up at us and said. Can you now understand why we feel so angry at the cavalier way the Episcopal Church deals with God's word?

But before we have a chance to answer he is back talking about Jesus and the mission of the church in Nigeria.

Three weeks after he spoke to us his house was again broken into and he and Gloria were severely beaten.

I don't want to make light of the serious issues that divide us within the Anglican Communion.

But neither am I going to let these issues divert us away from the mission Christ has entrusted to us.

Which leads me finish by quoting the opening words of John Stott's final address that I spoke about in my sermon earlier.

*I remember very vividly, some years ago, that the question which perplexed me as a younger Christian (and some of my friends as well) was this: what is God's purpose for His people? Granted that we have been converted, granted that we have been saved and received new life in Jesus Christ, what comes next? Of course, we knew the famous statement of the Westminster Shorter Catechism: that man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever: we knew that, and we believed it. We also toyed with some briefer statements, like one of only five words - love God, love your neighbour. But somehow neither of these, nor some others that we could mention, seemed wholly satisfactory. So I want to share with you where my mind has come to rest as I approach the end of my pilgrimage on earth and it is - God wants His people to become like Christ. Christlikeness is the will of God for the people of God.*

I simply repeat my charge to Synod that we take seriously the challenge to a missional discipleship to the honour and glory of God.

+Richard