**Letter from the Bishop**

**January 28, 2022**

My dear Friends in Christ,

Grace and peace to you in this season of Epiphany!

I look forward to gathering together as the Diocesan Synod of Eastern Newfoundland & Labrador on February 25-26, 2022. This will be a virtual gathering due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic restrictions. This will also be the first part of a two-part Synod, hoping that we will meet together in person later in the fall.

The Scriptural Theme for our Diocesan Synod is “Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering,” from Hebrews 10:23a. Many of us have heard the phrase “Hold Fast NL” throughout this pandemic as a call for us to remain diligent and hopeful in the face of COVID-19. The Letter to the Hebrews encourages us to hold fast to the hope we have in Jesus Christ.

Unlike the things which fade away when challenge or adversity threatens us, the one true constant that we can cling to is Christ - the foundation on which the Church is built. We have been speaking of how the Diocese must change to meet the needs of a rapidly changing world for many years now and through various Synods.

We discussed being the Body of Christ in the world, how the Church has left the building and most recently becoming a more missional people focused on the Church of the future. Plans and people were in place to begin this vital work only for everything to be put on hold in March 2020 by the COVID-19 pandemic. The changes we were planning to make in the Diocese over the coming years became very urgent and real with COVID-19. Diocesan funds earmarked for implementing new missional strategies and restructuring had to be diverted to meet the immediate needs of assisting parishes through support for our clergy and employees. We learned to adapt to closed church buildings with very little notice and moved to be an online faith community. Ministries in the Diocese such as the Resource Centre, Lavrock, Hospital Chaplaincy and others were either ended or reduced. Almost half of our parishes could not contribute their Diocesan assessment, and the Diocese could not meet our financial obligations to the National Church. Parishes that usually had full-time stipendiary ministry made difficult choices in reducing to half-time or less for clergy. We had to sell our Diocesan office for over 40 years at 19 King’s Bridge Road. This pandemic

has challenged not only our Diocesan identity but ourselves as the family of God. At this Synod, I hope that we will reset our focus on where God is leading us through this present time. We will be discussing how we as a Diocese can move forward in light of our current circumstances to ensure that ministry and mission can continue and grow in new ways.

As Bishop, it is clear to me that things will not be going back to the way they were before. We cannot go back because not only has the Diocese changed, but we also have changed as God’s family. That is why, amid all this change and uncertainty, we are called to hold fast to the one that is certain and secure. We hold fast to Christ - the foundation on which the Church is built. When things we have grown accustomed to are suddenly changed or taken away, what do we have left except Christ on which our faith and hope are built. And when we hold fast to this hope “without wavering,” we find strength and energy to do the impossible things we think we can’t do ourselves. For with God working in and through us, we know that “all things are possible to those who believe.” (Mark 9:23)

As we lead up to Synod, I ask you to pray for the work of the Spirit to come into our hearts and minds. Please pray for the delegates and those involved in the running of Synod. May God guide and direct our discussions and inspire and shape our planning. I offer this prayer from John Birch:

Release the gifts within us, Lord

That through fear or hesitation

We have yet to acknowledge or use,

That we might become the Church

You always wanted us to be,

A listening, caring, creative people,

A healing, giving and praying people

Filled with the Spirit of love and grace,

Your living Body here in this place.

Amen.

Yours in Christ’s love,

The Rt. Revd. Samuel V. Rose (He/Him)

Bishop

Diocese of Eastern Newfoundland & Labrador