BISHOP'S CHARGE TO SYNOD 2026

Team Rupert's Land: Courage, Connection, and Change

The God Who Meets Us in the Silence

1 Kings 19:4–13 • Psalm 66:7–11 • Ephesians 4:11–16 • John 14:1–11

"Speaking truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body is joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped…" (Eph. 4:15-16).

Let's pray,

Gracious and holy God,
may the truth be spoken with courage, humility, and love.
May only the truth be heard, received, and understood.
Silence every falsehood, confusion, fear, and hidden agenda.
Let honesty guide every word, wisdom shape every response,
and justice be served with mercy and grace. May hearts be open, minds be clear,
and may your light reveal what is right and true.
In all things, let truth prevail. Amen.

Arthur Sicard was eighteen years old when an ordinary day on his family's dairy farm near Montreal gave birth to an extraordinary idea. Winter made milk delivery difficult. Roads disappeared beneath the snow, communities became harder to reach, and farm work was frequently interrupted. One day, Sicard watched a neighbouring farmer's harvesting machine at work. He saw its rotating mechanism gather the crop and throw the straw and chaff aside. He began to wonder: if a machine could gather and throw straw, could a similar machine gather and throw snow?

The idea came to him in 1894, but its fulfilment did not come quickly. Sicard carried that question for more than thirty years. He observed, experimented, adapted existing machinery, and persevered. In 1925, when he was almost fifty, he produced a practical truck-mounted snowblower. By 1927, Sicard snowblowers were clearing roads in Outremont, helping people, goods, and services move through the winter. Sicard did not wait for winter to disappear. He did not deny its severity or simply complain about the roads. He took the conditions seriously enough to imagine a different response. Winter presented the challenge; patient construction created a way through it.

On 31 May 2025, when I stood before the Electoral Synod as your bishop-elect, I spoke of a familiar Canadian saying: Canada has two seasons - winter and construction. Arthur Sicard's story suggests that these seasons are not necessarily opposites. Sometimes winter is precisely what calls construction into being. Sometimes the obstacle before us awakens the imagination within us.

The Church also experiences winter. We know the winter of grief and uncertainty, demographic change, financial pressure, strained relationships, aging buildings, and familiar ways of ministry that no longer carry us as they once did. We should not deny these realities. But neither should we allow them to persuade us that our mission must stop. Winter can become a workshop for faithful innovation.

Faithful innovation does not mean abandoning the Gospel or disregarding our tradition. Sicard adapted a familiar mechanism to meet a new situation. In the same way, the Gospel remains unchanged, while the structures, habits, and methods through which we proclaim it may need to be renewed. We can look carefully at what is already in our hands and ask how it might be used differently for the sake of Christ and our neighbours.

Our readings speak to people who do not have everything figured out. They speak to tired people, burdened people, and faithful people who have reached the edge of what they know and are asking, 'Lord, what comes next?' That makes them good words for a Synod. That makes them good words for Team Rupert's Land. God is present in both seasons. In the winter that restores and forms us, and in the construction through which God makes room for new life.

God Restores

Elijah has proclaimed truth and confronted injustice. Now the mighty prophet sits beneath a broom tree, frightened and emptied. He then prayed, 'It is enough, O Lord.' Leaders know that prayer. Congregations know that prayer. Dioceses know that prayer. After demographic change, financial pressure, institutional uncertainty, isolation, and division, even faithful people can become weary.

But notice what God does. God does not shame Elijah. God feeds him. God lets him rest. God stayed near. Before giving Elijah another assignment, God restores his servant. This is holy winter. It’s not abandonment, but restoration. It is not wasted time, but preparation for the road ahead. We will build this diocese on prayer, grace, truth, and the restoring love of God.

Teresa of Avila and St John of the Cross, whom we remember today, lived in a Church under pressure. They did not answer panic with more panic. Both are recognized as Doctors of the Church. Teresa is known for her work, *The Interior Castle,* and John wrote *The Dark Night of the Soul*. Both works speak about listening to our inner being. They entered more deeply into prayer. Their witness reminds us that renewal moves from the inside out. God touches the heart, and then the hands begin to serve. We may revise budgets, structures, and patterns of ministry, but no budget can love a neighbour, no building can follow Jesus, and no strategic plan can pray. Only people can do that. People whose hearts are being renewed in Christ.

At Horeb, Elijah encounters wind, an earthquake, and fire. Yet God is made known in the sound of sheer silence. I believe God is calling Rupert's Land to become a listening Church. Listening before speaking. Praying before deciding. Attending to the Spirit in;

- the small parish,
- the overlooked neighbourhood,
- the voice of an Elder,
- the questions of a young person, and
- the wisdom of a newcomer.

Courage, Connection, and Change

Jesus says, "Do not let your hearts be troubled." He does not promise an easy road. He promises himself: "I am the way." Our hope is not a building, a bank balance, or a perfect plan. Our hope is Jesus Christ, present with us and leading us.

That is how I understand our Synod theme. Courage means telling the truth and taking the next faithful step. Connection means remembering that no parish, ministry, or leader stands alone. Change means allowing the Holy Spirit to reshape us for the mission God has given us now.

Without prayer,

- courage becomes noise,
- connection becomes networking,
- and change becomes management.

But with prayer,

- courage becomes faithfulness,
- connection becomes communion, and
- change becomes transformation.

What I Am Asking of Us

Over the next two years, I am asking every parish and diocesan ministry to work on four commitments. These are not four new programs from the diocesan office. They are a common direction for work that we will shape together.

1. A shared vision: Each parish and ministry will identify one outward-looking mission priority. One clear way you will serve your neighbours and share the love of Christ. One way that love takes flesh is when people are fed and welcomed. Many of our parishes already run food pantries, prepare meals, welcome newcomers, and visit isolated neighbours. On that day when Jesus fed the 5,000, he did not allow the disciples to send people away hungry. He said, and still says to us today, "You give them something to eat." I ask every parish to make one intentional "feed the neighbour" commitment within its outward mission priority. By Synod 2028, we will bring these commitments together in a diocesan mission map so we can see where God is at work and where support is needed.

2. Shared resources: We will take an honest inventory of what God has placed in our hands. For example, people, finances, buildings, land, technology, knowledge, and relationships. Then we will ask what can be shared across parish and Archdeaconry lines. A building used only a few hours each week may still become a gift to the community. A skilled treasurer, musician, administrator, or teacher may

be able to strengthen more than one congregation. A parish with retired clergy may share that gift with a struggling congregation which cannot afford the cost of supply clergy.

3. Shared leadership: We will strengthen formation for ordained and lay ministry, including wardens, vocational deacons, youth, and others whose gifts are emerging. I ask every parish to identify and accompany at least one person whose leadership God may be calling forth. Do not wait until every qualification is in place. Notice the gift, name it, and help it grow.

4. Stronger Together: We will look for practical ways to cooperate in administration, formation, outreach, property, and reconciliation. No parish is disposable. No community is invisible. No leader should carry the burden alone.

Mission Week: Remembering for the Sake of Truth, Relationship and Mission

The Anglican Diocese of Rupert's Land was established by Royal Letters Patent on May 21, 1849, and David Anderson was consecrated its first bishop on May 29. Beginning in 2027, I propose that we observe Rupert's Land Mission Week from May 23 to 30, concluding with a diocesan gathering on or near May 29 to mark the founding of our Anglican diocese.

But we must be clear about what began in 1849 and what did not. This land was not an empty field, forest, or river system waiting for the Church to arrive. Long before first contact and the arrival of Anglican missionaries, Indigenous people had their own societies, systems of governance, economies, kinship networks, spiritual traditions, and relationships with the land and with one another. Newcomers were often sustained by the knowledge, generosity, and care of Indigenous peoples. God was present here already.

We are therefore not remembering a time when this land or its peoples were "found." We are remembering the establishment of an Anglican institution whose history includes faithfulness and failure, sacrifice and service, mission and harm. That history includes the leadership and witness of Indigenous Christians such as the Reverend Henry Budd- *Sakachuwesum.* It must also make room for Indigenous experiences, voices, resistance, leadership, and spiritual traditions. As a Church, we have apologized for the spiritual harm caused by our actions. Honest remembrance must lead to repentance, renewed relationships, and faithful attention to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action addressed to the churches.

During Mission Week, parishes can share their stories, pray with common resources, listen to Indigenous voices, gather and eat together, and undertake one visible act of service. At our diocesan gathering, we will give thanks for what was faithful, lament the harm that was done, honour those whose stories have too often been overlooked, and renew our commitment to reconciliation and mission.

Reconciliation

We remember not for nostalgia or self-congratulation, but to ask a living question: **What does faithfulness require of us now?** That question must lead to concrete commitments shaped by Indigenous voices and priorities.

Reconciliation is not an optional diocesan project. It belongs to the Gospel. Beginning in 2027, I propose an annual Indigenous Ministry and Reconciliation Offering on a Sunday near National Indigenous Peoples Day, June 21 or the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, September 30.

This will be an invitation, not another levy. It will support Indigenous-led ministry, relationships, travel, education, healing, and cultural renewal. We will report each year on how the money is used, and Indigenous priorities will guide the work.

Everything Counts

In 1995, Oseola McCarty, a retired washerwoman in Mississippi, gave $150,000 (60%) of her life savings to help students attend university. She had built that gift little by little over a lifetime. Her simple wisdom was, "Everything counts."

That is true in the Church. Every prayer counts. Every hour volunteered counts. Every visit, meal, act of kindness, and dollar counts. Stewardship begins with a question: what has God entrusted to us, and how will we use it for mission?

So let me speak plainly about diocesan assessment. Our shared ministry depends on parishes contributing 12.5 percent of yearly income, fully and on time. I know this can be difficult. Parishes are facing the same rising costs and pressures as the diocese. If your parish anticipates difficulty, please speak with us early. Silence leaves the burden for other congregations to carry. Honest conversation gives us a chance to plan and help one another.

The Road to Synod 2028

The months after this Synod will be our winter work: listening, praying, healing, taking stock, and choosing priorities. In 2027, the construction begins in earnest: acting, sharing, repairing, experimenting, and strengthening what bears good fruit.

At Synod 2028, we will report honestly. What did we try? What did we learn? Where did we see new life? What must we stop, continue, or change? We will not measure faithfulness only by attendance, budgets, or buildings. We will also ask:

- Are people growing in prayer and discipleship?
- Are hungry people being fed?
- Do our neighbours experience the love of Christ through us?
- Are we becoming more like Jesus?

A Church That Gives Itself Away

Elijah found God in the silence.

Teresa and John found God in the depths of prayer.

The disciples found God in the face of Jesus.

And the living Christ meets us here - in this Synod, in this Diocese.

So let us become a present and deeply listening Church.

- A Church willing to do the quiet work of winter and the demanding work of construction

- A Church that builds trust,
    - discerns wisely,
    - accompanies with hope,
    - shares generously,
    - feeds the hungry,
    - walks the path of reconciliation,
    - honours its many communities, and
    - gives itself joyfully to one mission.

Because we are:

One Diocese in **Many Communities** pursuing **One Mission.**

We are:

Team Rupert's Land with **Courage** to tell the truth, **Connection** to carry one another, and faith to embrace the **Change** through which God is making all things new.

And when anxiety rises, let us hear Jesus again:

'Do not let your hearts be troubled.'

We do not know every turn in the road, but we know the One who is the Way.

- The God who sustained Elijah,
- the God who guided Teresa and John, and the
- God revealed in Jesus Christ is not finished with Rupert's Land.

Like Oseala McCarty: Everything counts. Everyone has something to offer. Some will pray through the winter; some will draw the plans; some will carry the tools; some will clear the rubble; some will welcome the neighbours; and all of us can make room for what God is building. Together, by the grace of God, we can become the Church Christ is calling us to be- **Team Rupert's Land: Courage, Connection and Change.** *Amen.*

+Naboth