

THE DIOCESE OF THE BAHAMAS AND THE TURKS AND CAICOS ISLANDS

THE BISHOP'S CHARGE TO THE ONE-HUNDRED AND TWELFTH SESSION OF SYNOD

AT THE SYNOD OPENING EUCHARIST IN CHRIST CHURCH CATHEDRAL, NASSAU

ON MONDAY, 21ST OCTOBER, 2013, AT 7:30 P.M.

I welcome you all into Christ Church Cathedral this evening on the occasion of the Opening Service of the 112th Session of the Synod of the Anglican Diocese of the Bahamas and the Turks and Caicos Islands.

We welcome:

His Excellency, the Governor General and Lady Foulkes

The Rt. Honourable Prime Minister

The Honourable Chief Justice

The Honourable Deputy Prime Minister

Cabinet Ministers

The Honourable Loretta Butler-Turner representing the Leader of the Opposition

Senators

Members of Parliament

Former Governor General, the Hon. A. D. Hanna

We welcome:

Dr. Ranford Patterson, President of the Bahamas Christian Council

Archbishop Drexel Gomez, Bishop Gilbert Thompson, The Dean, Archdeacons, Canons and other members of the clergy and their spouses.

The Lay Delegates to the 112th Session of Synod from all over our beloved Diocese

Archdeacon Bryan Hobbs from our Companion Diocese of Southeast Florida

The new Chancellor, Mr. Justice Bernard Turner, the new Vice Chancellor, Mrs. Diane Stewart, the new Registrar, Mrs. Tonya Bastian-Galanis to their first synod in these posts and look forward to many more.

All Diocesan Officials

The newly-appointed Director of Education, Mrs. Italia Davies, to her first synod in this new post. We welcome the Deputy Director of Education along with Principals, Senior Administrators and students from our four Anglican Schools, including the St. Anne's School Choir.

Mrs. Tiffany Hall-Sweeting, newly appointed Diocesan Youth Officer to her first synod in that capacity.

Diocesan Office Staff

Catechists, Lay Readers, Servers from all over the diocese.

My brothers and sisters.

We welcome those sharing in this service via Cable Bahamas Television, ZNS TV 13 and ZNS AM and FM radio, as well as via live internet streaming through the diocesan Website.

Thank you for sharing with us.

We are grateful to the Dean and Staff of the Cathedral, Mr. Henderson Burrows, Mr. Christopher Smith and all of the ministries that have come together to make this service possible

Please join me in thanking God for the ministry of the St. Anne's School Choir. They are led by Mrs. Karolanne Jervis and Mr. Darrel Hurston.

We remain indebted to Archdeacon James Palacious, Miss Linda Farrington and the hard working Diocesan Office Staff who do an excellent job every year in preparing for the business sessions of Synod.

To God be the glory.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

2 Corinthians 4:1 Therefore since it is through God's mercy that we have this ministry, we do not lose heart.

It is our privilege to convene this 112th session of Diocesan Synod and to declare it open in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

We begin our Charge by focusing on St. Paul speaking to the Church at Corinth in New Testament times. As a young church in a large thriving seaport city there were many distractions: false teachers, commerce and materialism, ideas cultures and practices from all over the world. It was a struggle to maintain the identity, integrity and message of the gospel in all of this. Sounds like our own day, doesn't it?

In this reality Paul urges the saints at Corinth to be steadfast because "since it is through God's mercy that we share in this ministry, we do not lose heart."

It is a privilege to meet and to be the church in our own times. History is full of difficult times and in every age the faithful have been put to the test: whether it was Moses leading a large group of people through the wilderness and the trying experience they all had; or them trying to settle in the promised land, a new and often uninviting land; or Elijah fleeing for his life in a climate made intolerable for the faithful by King Ahab and Queen Jezebel; or when Paul wrote to Timothy lamenting the direction so many were headed in, when he said that people would be "lovers of their own selves, ... lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God. Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof." (2 Timothy 3:2, 4 and 5). These times described are akin to the challenging times we face in our world today, the pressures, worries, forces, the screens(TV and computer), the information overload and circumstances that affect us. But in this environment as a church we must stand fast, do right and believe that God is still in charge of His world. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 15:58, "Be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord."

1 Peter (4:12) advises us further: "Dear friends, DO NOT be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you."

Human life is still a wonderful thing: being live, having the power to move and to make choices. We still live in two beautiful countries, The Bahamas and The Turks and Caicos Islands. We must ever forget this: our cup is half full, not half empty. However there are things that challenge, upset and offend us. In these kinds of times the Church must stand fast and never give up. This world is God's and we do our part, stand firm and persevere in all of the quarters we frequent, and we let God do the rest.

We Christians must also seek to make the world a better place and do all in our power to cause others to do so as well. That is why a social awareness and social conscience must always accompany the gospel. The Christian must look out into the world and challenge the world to be a better place, while reading our Bibles and newspapers and magazines.

GOVERNMENT

I wish to commend the current majority party for all of its genuine efforts to make a difference. However I am quick to encourage the Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition to do their best since the "Government of the Bahamas" is the union of both majority and minority parties joined in the running of affairs for the good of that country.

In my view there is still too much "political" fighting in the governing chambers, and in other quarters of this country – rather than a differences-aside, get-down-to-work attitude that seeks to build this country in spite of political and other differences. **AND BOTH PARTIES ARE GUILTY OF THIS FROM TIME TO TIME.**

In my view, elected officials, party leadership and rank and file membership often lose sight of the higher call of national development because of petty politics.

This is not good.

I wish to take this opportunity to welcome to this diocese the new Royal Governor of the Turks and Caicos Islands, His Excellency Peter Beckingham and Mrs. Beckingham. Governor Beckingham was sworn in on Wednesday, 9th October.

We wish him well in his new assignment. The Anglican Church pledges him our full support. We wish him and Mrs. Beckingham a happy stay in the Turks and Caicos Islands.

We also take this opportunity to congratulate the newly-elected government of the Turks and Caicos Islands: the Premier, Dr. Rufus Ewing, and the Leader of the Opposition, the Hon. Charlene Cartwright-Robinson. I wish them and their parties well. I challenge them to stand firm in their respective roles and to work together for TCI.

We sympathize with the new leadership because the new constitution gives inordinate power to the permanent secretaries in government ministries who report directly to the Deputy Governor. This means that cabinet ministers literally have authority and no power.

This is a weakness on the part of the new constitution. It does create a vexing impediment for the current leaders, but press on, my brothers and sisters, in spite of this.

CRIME

Crime continues to be a major concern for all of us. I commend present and former governments on sincere efforts to deal with crime. I commend the current Minister of National Security for recent efforts: the public crime forum, increased deployment of the police and other agencies, and his own personal commitment. (Incidentally we keep the Minister, Mrs. Nottage and family in our prayers at this time. May they be encouraged, and lifted up by our love and by our prayers.) However, there is still so much more that can be done. In my opinion, Law enforcement agencies know who some perpetrators are and where some things are happening and they do nothing. Some persons who need to be persons

of interest are not touched. Politics, party and organizational, continues to hamper the course of justice. Regardless of our political, racial economic or social status, no person is or should be perceived to be beyond the reach of the law.

Genuine efforts have been made to improve the administration of justice and we urge that these continue. The greater coordination between the various arms of the judicial system is commendable, as it is already bearing fruit.

The availability of legal counsel, the selection of jurors, the availability of police and citizen witnesses SHOULD all work in harmony for the dispensing of justice and SHOULD NOT facilitate the prolonging of cases. No one part of the system must be allowed to hold the rest of the system to ransom "Justice delayed is justice deemed."

Worldwide there has been a debate on alternative dispute resolution systems. This is a good thing. If we had more trained arbitrators and mediators who could settle disputes that would help. Perhaps Justices of the Peace could also be empowered and encouraged to do more as keepers or facilitators of the peace rather than simply persons who prepare documents. This is a biblical principle that we see in the elder sitting at the gate resolving disputes. This would help to relieve the tension and diffuse conflict. This is also a crime-fighting tool.

The crime picture in The Turks and Caicos Islands is less complicated than here in The Bahamas. Happily they are experiencing less crime in recent times than they had been. I commend the government, the police and the citizens for these improvements.

PUBLIC HOLIDAYS

I wish to applaud the government, other groups and individuals for bringing us to the point of having a National Heroes Day Holiday and a Majority Rule Day Holiday.

Columbus Day or Discovery Day speaks to a historical reality which cannot be overlooked, i.e., the meeting of what was then two worlds. However, it is easy to see how there might be a need to focus on other realities which speak more to the priorities of our present age. A focus on National Heroes is symptomatic of a maturing national consciousness. Careful attention must now be given to the criteria for being designated a National Hero. We must not cheapen the National Hero process by emotion, short-sightedness, poor planning and rash decisions.

Similarly, the matter of local honours must be looked at carefully so that there are clear categories and transparent criteria for qualifying. I admire and respect the honours from Great Britain; however, having our own is a part of evolving national identity.

Majority Rule Day is another timely observance. Whatever your colour or politics, one has to admit that 10th January 1967 is the most significant day in Bahamian history since Emancipation. Apart from being about sovereignty and self-determination for the black masses, it ushered The Bahamas into a new economic era such as had not been experienced before. More education, exposure, accessibility of resource and availability of resources catapulted this country into a prosperity that is the envy of the world. I recognize that many cringe at the thought of another public holiday added to the calendar and the fact of the matter is that holidays do add to the cost of doing business in the country. It would be good if as we embrace an additional holiday we each commit to doing better on our jobs on all working days.

NATIONAL HEALTH INSURANCE SCHEME/ PRESCRIPTION DRUG PLAN (NHIS/PDP)

I wish to applaud the local discussion about the National Health Insurance Scheme and the Prescription Drug Plan – one under discussion and the other already initiated in a basic form. Both are good initiatives because there are far too many people who cannot get decent health care or adequate prescription medication because they cannot afford it.

The Turks and Caicos Islands have had a National Health Insurance Plan (NHIP) in place for a number of years. It is a good thing that has done a lot of good. It does have its limits in that some persons who need preventative care cannot get it in a timely or simple fashion. Citizens are also concerned about the fact

that patients have to do a lot of travelling, i.e., from Grand Turk to get medical services in Provo, or even to travel to The Bahamas, Cuba, The Dominican Republic or the USA for medical services. Some of this is unavoidable. However, with the amount that has been spent on the two new hospitals in Grand Turks and Providenciales, we encourage the government to continue to work hard toward the providing of all the basic medical services-preventative and interventional.

I say again that these national health and prescription plans are VITAL since there are too many poor people and some not so poor, who suffer because they cannot afford even basic health care.

JOBS

Unemployment remains a biting concern in the Turks and Caicos Islands. The country is still feeling the effects of the redundancy exercises of a few years ago where many skilled civil servants were allowed to leave the service. The private sector there is relatively small and fairly limited and so there has been no real increased availability of jobs generally. So concern is great. We encourage the government to continue to seek foreign and local investment and to do whatever else it can to stimulate the economy. We are delighted that this is an area that the new governor has already expressed his commitment to.

In the Bahamas, we are deeply concerned because it is said that unemployment is as high as 19 – 23% in some islands. We have a particular concern for Grand Bahama which had two major hurricanes from which it has not yet recovered, and continued economic decline of staggering proportions. However all the islands have these challenges.

We encourage the government to continue work harder to spread the wealth and to create opportunity for all. The hopes and aspirations of the people need to be facilitated. We need to make it easier for Bahamians to do business and to invest in their own country, particularly those who want to start their own business.

And with respect to working, there are many Bahamians and Turks and Caicos Islands who work hard. However, there are too many who do not have a good work ethic at all: many want a job but do not want to work. Local and foreign business-owners have commented on this. If we are not careful we will make it too expensive for business owners to run businesses and we will eventually lose employing entities. Those who complain about the availability of jobs need to be careful how they conduct themselves when they get one lest they destroy the reputation of our two countries.

In this increasingly global environment workers must take their jobs seriously since they are not just competing with workers at home but with workers all over the world.

VAT

I wish to commend successive governments for raising the issue of Value Added Tax as an alternate source of revenue. This is a timely discussion as the system instituted in various forms all over the world. We recognize that customs duties, as a principal source of revenue for governments, are not desirable or sustainable, and that many countries have moved away from it.

The issue of VAT is a complicated one that draws many reactions for and against. I urge the government of the Bahamas to move forward with caution, to increase and widen education and discussion, to allay fears and concerns, and not to rush to any hasty formulations or to implementation.

PRICE CONTROL

Following on the question of taxation there is an even greater concern about prices in the Bahamas. I continue to be amazed at the fact that merchants make as much as 400-500% profit on a basic Florida price. Such mark-ups are criminal. Food prices continue to rise making it harder for people to feed their families. The government needs to look into this and stem this mark-up tide by some means.

I am quick to add that one difficulty which retailers face is pilferage, employees and sometimes others who steal. Many merchants have to wrestle with this and it is not fair to them. It is the reason for SOME of the mark-up. If you are concerned about prices, stop stealing from your boss. Do an honest day's work. When you steal you drive up the cost of doing business and eventually make it bad for everyone.

THE ENVIRONMENT

As citizens of our respective countries, we need to be aware of the value of our natural environments. Once spoiled it is hard or impossible to get them pristine again. Littering, dumping waste, overdevelopment and other forms of degradation need to be curtailed BY ALL OF US.

Governments must continue to strike the balance between development and protecting the environment. Proper Environmental Impact Studies must be done. Developers need to comply with local laws. Here in the Bahamas, both in New Providence and the Family Islands, we have some scandalous, scandalous examples of this not being done. I urge the government to put its foot down and help to protect our land.

CONCLUSION

These are only some of the issues to some of the concerns about which we pray and agitate. The Church must continue to be the Church. How?

- Stand on the Gospel tradition – the Bible teaches and encourages a set of values and a way of life that cannot be beaten.

· Set the right example in your life. None of us is perfect but we are called to a standard that Jesus calls us to.

· Be people whom others can respect and look up to.

· Show forth in your life on Monday through Saturday what you stand for by going to church on Sunday. For too many of us there is a divide between the two. We have one set of values on Sunday, which we throw away for the rest of the week. People do not see what we claim to believe, and so they take us and our faith for a joke. Why? Because they do not see seriousness in us.

· Support the work and ministry of your church. That is the spiritual family to which you belong so let your allegiance be seen in your living, your priorities, your commitments and your finances.

· Be a good citizen. The biblical standard is that we should render to Caesar and to God what belongs to each. Our faith should be lived out in part in our national responsibilities. Give time to your country. Serve your country. Respect and support the laws and programmes and initiatives of your country.

· Get back to basics. Prayer, Bible reading, Acts of Christian charity, personal sacrifice, individual devotion, going to church regularly.

Do not give up. This is God's world and these are God's two countries. Never get tired and say that all is lost because all is never lost if citizens who believe in God keep on working and building because that know that faith in Jesus is lived out in whatever country Jesus put you in. Even national life is a part of the ministry of the Christian so in this service and in all Christian work we persevere.

“Therefore since it is through God's mercy that we have this ministry, we do not lose heart.