**The Diocese of Montreal**

**Bishop’s Charge, June 18, 2016 The Right Rev. Mary Irwin-Gibson**

We meet today in the ninth month after my consecration as your bishop. This has been a season of firsts for me, and for all of us, as I have continued to grow into this new calling and ministry. I am very grateful for the gifts that each of us brings to this Diocese and for the complement of faith, commitment, vision and institutional learning that together we bring to ministry.

Notre synode se tient ce printemps pour éviter de surcharger l’automne quand les programmes débutent au sein de la paroisse. Je remercie le comité pour la planification de Synode qui a travaillé fort avec une échéance raccourcie. Le thème que le comité a choisi est *Vérité et Réconciliation: Les Anglicans Répondent*. Tout simplement, nous nous devons de nous engager et de nous poser la question: Qu’est ce que cela nous demande de faire? Quelle est la réponse qui nous est exigée?

Our theme for this Synod is *Truth & Reconciliation: Anglicans Respond.* The question for each of us, however, is to understand why truth and reconciliation should matter to us and what we are prepared to do in response to the recommendations and calls to action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada.

As someone whose ancestry in Canada dates back for seven generations and whose ‘settler’ family was saved by a member of the Delaware or Lenape Nation, as they call themselves, I want to improve my understanding of and commitment to a holy and right relationship with the first people of this land and the many nations, each with their own history and traditions.

Our response as a diocese should involve our parishes in getting to know more about the first nations, metis and Inuit people around us and living in our communities; in listening and not being too quick to speak or too arrogant or complacent about our own world view. In March, the Primate, Fred Hiltz attended a service in the Mohawk chapel in Brantford where he officially apologized for the residential school tragedy. He also restated the repudiation of the Doctrine of Discovery and promised to fulfill the [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.](http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/DRIPS_en.pdf)

At the annual Clergy Lenten Retreat led by the Right Rev. Mark Macdonald, the National Indigenous Bishop, we began by participating in something called the Blanket Exercise. It provided a new perspective on the experience of the first nations when settlers arrived and took over their land by one means or another and their traditional territories shrank or were appropriated with fundamentally different assumptions about land ownership and rights. It was a profoundly moving experience for the group as many of our lifetime assumptions were challenged.

Bishop Mark Macdonald had much wisdom and insight to share. He also suggested that those who really want to make amends attend local powwows, meet with indigenous people and learn some of their traditions. While we have talked about the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Report, it is important for us to become familiar with the Calls to Action, and especially those directed at the church. Our city houses many people whose lives were touched and damaged by residential schools and who need healing. Please pray for them and open your hearts to them.

I would like us to thank Bishop Leonard Whitten, the retired bishop of Western Newfoundland, who graciously offered shared episcopal ministry to Bishop Barry Clarke when six clergy and their parishes requested it. Bishop Whitten contacted me soon after I arrived last fall and said that he wished to retire. We are grateful for his support and wish him every blessing and joy in his retirement. Since becoming bishop, I have been invited to preach and celebrate in all of the parishes concerned, including for Confirmation in a couple of them. I am committed to our diocese having room for clergy and parishes with vastly differing views on some of the difficult subjects that divide Christians. I believe that unity does not mean that we agree about everything or that we share all the same values.

L’unité chrétienne est fondamentale et réalisable si nous nous tenons comme ambassadeurs du Christ. Les ambassadeurs ont le devoir de tenir une vision plus large du royaume de Dieu et de promouvoir la perspective qu’en Christ il y a une créature nouvelle. L’évangile de ce matin nous montre que même ceux qui entouraient Jésus ne comprenait pas toujours ce qu’il disait ni ce qu’il exigeait de ses disciples. Notre discernement de la volonté de Dieu doit être ancré dans notre désir profond de vivre la liberté que Christ nous donne, de l’aimer et de s’aimer. Cela demande beaucoup de travail et d’approfondissement de notre engagement chrétien. C’est peut-être plus facile pour certains d’aller se refugier avec d’autres personnes qui pensent comme eux.

The Gospel reading for today shows how easily our assumptions and worldview run into God’s Kingdom view and purposes. Our work as ambassadors for Christ is to apply a generous amount of patience and flexibility with one another, while keeping our eye on Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith. Christian unity is one of my values, even if we won’t always agree on everything or share the same cultural assumptions. The challenges that the church faces now are not more difficult than those encountered in the early church and it is possible to achieve unity in diversity. Our fundamental commitment must be to be grace-filled disciples of Jesus, not spiritual police or a shrinking club of entirely like-minded people. The following is an excerpt from a document on discipleship:

“Exclusivity has no place in the family of God; all God-centred relationships are inclusive, and our evangelism has nothing to do with numbers and power but everything to do with love, generosity, inclusion, and the all-encompassing life and love of God.

As our daily following of Jesus, our apostolic vocation, draws us deeper into the Body of Christ, the life of the Triune God, reconciliation becomes a pressing priority. Humanity shares the brokenness and pain of our world, and this needs to be brought to God, to be offered at the Cross – to find reconciliation, wholeness, and life in the shattered life of God. As Paul reminds us, the heart of our discipleship is not only to ‘be reconciled’ with God but also to exercise a ‘ministry of reconciliation’ (2 Cor 5.11–21). That ministry is to be exercised within the Church, in the wider community, and in our relationship with the whole created order. In many ways this life of reconciliation is the most public aspect of our Christian discipleship and at the same time deeply enmeshed with our witness, or evangelism.” *Intentional Discipleship and Disciple-Making; An Anglican Guide for Christian Life and Formation* The Anglican Consultative Council, 2016

The rights and welcome of all members of the church are subjects that preoccupy many people, not only the aboriginal people and people of different ethnic origins and languages, and theologies, but also those whose sexuality does not fit neatly into traditional categories. Church members who are LGBTQ and those who agree are asking the Anglican Church to make a change which the United Church and the Lutheran Church in Canada have already made.

This year’s General Synod will look at the question of revising the Marriage Canon with a view to allowing same sex couples to be married. The House of Bishops held an extra meeting to try to address this upcoming motion and it has been part of our conversations at our two regular meetings. Most of you will have heard plenty about it through the media. For my part, I have been besieged with petitions and individual letters (almost all of them from outside our diocese) demanding that I accord equal rights to same sex couples.

My intention is to vote in favour of the motion but not simply because it is a human rights issue or because the volley of letters has worn me down. The Church has the right and obligation to prayerfully consider new things and not simply to march in lockstep with society. Neither are we to remain stuck by interpretations of Biblical principles which not everyone shares. If we are to be ambassadors of reconciliation, disciples of Christ, I see the potential in ministering grace and sacraments to more people and in calling all married couples to be models of Christian discipleship and hospitality. While feelings are very raw in many corners, I believe the Gospel calls us to stay at the table together, to love God and to love each other. We will not all agree but we are one body.

It does not seem likely that this canonical change will receive the required two-thirds majority by the laity, clergy and bishops, so the House of Bishops is considering what to do afterwards. Several dioceses are more than ready to go ahead and some don’t ever see that day coming. The Chancellor of General Synod is being consulted and we will see what happens after General Synod concludes.

Our Diocesan strategic plan, 2020Vision invites us to focus on five key goals:

* Discipleship
* Parish Financial Health
* Vital Church
* Leadership Development
* Diocesan Structures

Fundamental to this plan is an ongoing partnership and accountability between the Diocese and the Parishes. A poster is available for you to take to your churches and a copy of it is in the convening circular. This plan will be the lens through which we view our efforts.

Discipleship and disciple making are critical factors in the future health of the church. The Anglican Consultative Council document refers to many ways of making disciples. I encourage you to find it online and read it. Our hope for the future of the church lies in finding ways to nurture more followers of Jesus.

The aboriginal church has developed a resource called [A Disciple’s Prayer Book](http://www.anglican.ca/im/introgbd/). Based on a simplified Book of Common Prayer, the focus is the gospel of the day. Participants pray together and listen to the gospel reading. They reflect on what they have heard and what they feel the gospel is saying to them and asking them to do. This resource can also be found online.

The Diocese of Montreal has made resources available to help with our Vision2020. Our Diocesan Missioner, Mark Dunwoody is always available for a consult. Among many other things, Mark works in leadership training for the Montreal Youth and he supports the Church Planting Ideas Group. We know that other church groups are starting new churches around us. How can we learn to capture these opportunities for Christ? Mark has been instrumental in supporting the church plant pilot project at St. James’, Montreal. We are pleased that the initial phase has seen at least 60 people attend an Alpha course and several of them sign on as leaders for the official launch and the next course in September. Those who want to learn more about this are invited to connect with Mark or the Rev. Graham Singh. We hope to encourage more sharing of learnings and resources.

The Bishop’s Missioner, Nick Brotherwood, has been training parishes in a program called “Reimagining Church” and “Natural Church Development”. Both of these programs can give a parish some tools and new understanding about the opportunities for improved ministry and mission.

This year I am pleased to announce that the Bishop’s Awards are being given to:

Eric Dryden of the Parish of Bedford, Farnham and Philipsburg

Marjorie Sharp of Christ Church Cathedral

Jarka Loffelman of Christ Church, Rawdon

We celebrate your dedication and generous hard work in your fields of ministry.

I am naming the Rev Keith Schmidt an Honorary Canon of the Cathedral. Keith has been ordained 27 years and has served the parish of St. John the Evangelist for 16 of them.

I am also naming the Rev. David Sinclair an Honorary Canon of Christ Church Cathedral. David was a Canon of St. George’s Cathedral in Kingston, and has retained his ties to the Diocese of Ontario but he has served this diocese for many years beginning in St. Sauveur and Morin Heights, as the honorary assistant and then interim priest in Ste-Agathe before sharing his time with the Parish of Arundel. Most recently he spent several months as interim dean in our partner diocese, now known as the Territory of the People, with Bishop Barbara Andrews.

The Venerable Michael Johnson retired early this spring and the Venerable Ralph Leavitt has announced his retirement as of the end of August. We thank them both for their leadership and hard work and for their support of me in my new role.

I was pleased when the Venerable Tim Smart accepted to serve as Archdeacon of Bedford and the Richelieu and the South Shore as of January 1st and I am announcing the appointment of the Rev. Pamela Yarrow as Archdeacon of St. Lawrence, effective today. Both Pamela and Tim bring valuable gifts to this ministry.

Harvey Shepherd has been a journalist in Montreal for many years and the editor of the Montreal Anglican paper for most of a decade. A more informative article about Harvey can be found in the current issue of the Montreal Anglican. He retires at the end of this month and we thank Harvey for his dedication and hard work on our behalf and wish him and his wife Jean much delight and blessing as they free themselves to enjoy their wisdom years together.

In March, our office said goodbye to Sophie Bertrand, who served as the Director of Human Resources for the Diocese for five years. Sophie was a passionate contributor to the work of the Synod Office. Sadly, family needs called her away and we thank her for her time with us. Sophie has kindly supported Cynthia Cassab who took over the human resources work. A key piece of work that needed doing was that of Diocesan Synod Coordinator. I am particularly grateful to the Rev. Robert Camara, who graciously accepted to take that on. Robert is also supervising the implementing of the Safe Church Policy.

Two other other updates to mention. Firstly, a committee has been struck to make recommendations on improvements to Canon 1 on the election of a bishop. I don’t expect that to be needed for a while, but this is a good time to do this work. Secondly, the Trustees of the diocesan Anglican Fund has begun planning how and when to begin divesting our investments in fossil fuel-based companies.

I want to end by thanking all the Synod office staff for the way in which they all contribute to enabling the work of our Diocese. Each of us is called upon to be generous and flexible and hard working. Together we make a great team. Thank you.