



DIOCESE OF KOOTENAY
The Anglican Church of Canada

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The Most Rev. John E. Privett, *Archbishop*

Archbishop's Pastoral Letter
Ash Wednesday 2011

Dear Friends,

Today we renew our journey toward new life. The seasons of the church invite us to reflect more deeply on the gift of life that has been given to us and to consider how it is that we offer our thanks to God for what we have received. The words of the Ash Wednesday service call us to consider our lives as they are before God – in our joy and gratitude and in our sorrow and shame. *Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return.* Those words reminds us that we are destined for death and call us to consider what it is that we have done and are doing with the precious gift of life. How have we received what God showers upon us each day? How have we squandered the gifts of life? How have we returned our thanks to God? The Lenten journey is a journey from death to life, from darkness to light; from ashes to Easter. As we journey with Jesus toward the cross we make a journey that involves a reorientation of our lives that resets our priorities, that aligns our lives with God's life, and which leads through the path of self-offering and sacrifice to the new life that defies the limits of time and space. I pray that this season of Lent may strengthen each of us in the way of the cross which is the way of life.

There are many changes facing us a church, as congregations and as individual people of faith. Our increasingly secular world is less supportive and less aware of the Church and less tolerant of faith. There is a huge array of options for our friends and neighbours each and every Sunday to say nothing of week day choices. I am so impressed when I see members of our congregations faithfully joining in worship with others week by week in our parish churches. That in itself is an enormous contribution to the proclamation of the gospel which we must not take for granted. Many of our congregations are feeling the stress of diminished numbers and resources. I am aware that many of our smaller congregations are facing huge decisions about the future – how they will exercise ministry, how they will employ clergy and how they will continue a faithful presence in our communities. In the midst of great challenges, individuals and congregations are choosing new and innovative ways to live out the life of the Church in a rapidly changing context. I am so grateful for the quiet commitment to Christ and the church that is found throughout the diocese.

Our Diocese is seeking to respond to these current conditions in ways that will strengthen and renew our life together. A new Spiritual Development Committee of the diocese has been formed to provide leadership and resources for individuals and parishes seeking to explore our life in God more fully. When we seek to deepen our own lives of faith, we strengthen the life of the whole Church. You will find more information on the diocesan website and I encourage you to embrace some of the opportunities there.

The Archbishop's Committee on Ministry has been working diligently to coordinate the diverse ministries within the diocese and to develop new opportunities for quality education for lay people and clergy. The recently launched Kootenay School of Ministry provides education for individuals interested in growing in Christian understanding and for the training of local priests and deacons who will serve throughout the diocese. I am excited that we are now able to enrich and encourage the faith and ministry of individuals through the work of the school. In the future more of our smallest parishes will be served by clergy and laity who are locally trained for non-stipendiary ministry. I encourage you to watch for updated information on our website.

I have assembled a small task force to consider our options with respect to the blessing of same-sex relationships. After the strong motion in support of same sex blessings at our last Diocesan Synod and last year's statement from General Synod, I have asked for some recommendations to be prepared for me to consider as we prayerfully seek to establish a faithful and pastorally appropriate response to the needs of our diocese. While this is a highly politicized issue with a variety of theological considerations, we must always remember that our conversations are about real people seeking to live faithful lives in the midst of our congregations.

Each of these form part of the mission of God that comes to us ever new as new circumstances and new contexts give rise to new opportunities. In all things we live with the knowledge that the One who called us into life, has also given us the promise of a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. We are facing many challenges as a church and as individuals, and we know that change is upon us. Some of what we have come to know and cherish may not be part of our common future and others will remain central. For each of us, some of the changes will feel like a death, but we must also remember the Christian way is all about dying and rising again. The season of Lent serves to remind us that it is precisely in the dying that we are born to eternal life.

I wish you a holy journey during these days of Lent and may the God who has called us to life in all its fullness, bless and uphold each one.

Faithfully,

+ *John*