

What is in Your Hands: *Let Us Respond to the Call for the Mission of God with Joy and Thanksgiving*



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Joy. What comes to your mind when you hear this simple word? What does this beautiful word make us ponder about ourselves? Our parishes? We have gathered here in Karonga for the first time as a Diocese to hold our eighth Diocesan Synod. This is a special time when we reflect on how we have done in our mission in the past years as we look forward to the next two years. It is my hope that we can reflect, assess and dream standing in the light of those words. Let us ask ourselves whether we are walking in that light of Christ daily, seeing God at work around us or if we may be still wandering about, in bitterness, resentment, fear, doubt and worry as the Children of Israel so often did in the wilderness. But God was preparing His people all the while, daily impressing upon their hearts the deep knowledge of His love, providence, care and yes, a plan was being accomplished. Are we also, as we continue to work out our future, growing in our own knowledge and love of God, daily seeing His provision and purpose, and daily responding with courage, faith and yes, Joy and thanksgiving, to the mission that God is calling us to do?

In our first Charge we said “Yes We Can” in accepting the reality of our growth into this maturity. But we found out that we were still living in despondence by the spirit of poverty and the spirit of being an orphan. Our Second Charge dealt with these challenges by asking “What is in Your Hands?” as a means to grow. We asked the Parishes to begin taking a first step to walk on their feet building on the strength of the vision of our two leaders, Bishop Biggers and Bishop Boyle. We wanted our Parishes to look at their potential and use that potential to begin to do new things, to think creatively hopefully, moving forward in the Christian life.

Over these years, we have seen that some Parishes have indeed captured the vision by identifying what was in their hands and began to move forward. Yet, others are still remaining behind. We congratulate and rejoice with the Parishes that have demonstrated the signs of growth through the timely giving of their assessment for the welfare of their clergy ministering in their parishes. You have decided to walk with much courage and gained great strength through your progress and you have demonstrated sacrificially that it is possible to grow from strength to strength.

In particular we would like to congratulate the Parish of Kabuwa, that in spite of their remote location where very few of the faithful have an income every month, in the recent years they led the completion of their assessments as early as July. We would also like to congratulate St. John's Chiteko; St. Peter's Cathedral; St. Mark's, Mzuzu and Nkhwazi; St. Paul's Mchengabutuwa, Holy Trinity; St. Mary's, Same; and St. Dunstan, Mzimba for completing their assessment on time last year and some have already done that this year. We do not need to stop there but to continue to grow so that we can graduate from being assisted Parishes to full Parishes. At the same time we want to encourage those of the Parishes that are lagging behind to let them know that they can also make it, and say, "Keep going! The Lord is leading you!" As the Lord said to Joshua, He says to all of us: "As I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will never leave you nor forsake you. Be strong and very courageous! Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go." (Joshua 1:9)

If you check in the Acts of the Diocese, none of our current churches has a capacity to be called a Parish. They are all what are referred to as assisted Parishes. As an assisted Parish is one that is "undertaken to maintain its own work and pay such quota as DSC [Diocesan Standing Committee] may determine."¹ And when all our Parishes assume the status of being a full Parish they would be understood as a Church that "has undertaken total responsibility for the work of the Church within its area and to pay to the Diocese a quota which shall at least meet the stipends of the clergy and catechists working in the parish."² When all our parishes reach this status we shall indeed rejoice and praise the Lord that we are indeed growing. The benefit of this growth is that the vestry will regain their strength of nominating their own Priest and the role of the Bishop will therefore be to approve or disapprove the choice of the Parish upon discussion. In other words, the Parish will be vested with the powers to call their own Priest as a Rector and not a Priest in Charge, as is the case today. How can we grow and be a church that lives with this joy of growth? This is the way that I am excited to share with you.

¹ Acts of the Diocese, 2010, 39

² Acts, 39.

1. Development and Strategic Plan

Our strategic plan for the last five years has come to an end and we will be adopting a new one that will take us through the next five years. We have done well in some indicators but we have also failed to be where we wanted to be because of ongoing financial challenges. We shall, therefore, include those indicators we did not complete into the new strategic plan while praising the Lord for those things we have ably done. We have also learned some lessons that we cannot repeat doing it in the same way. For instance, our land acquisition unfortunately taught us some bitter lessons that we will be able to avoid in the future, with the Lord's help.

Our strategic plan had two main distinctive features, the spiritual life, and our response to the needs of the society, which were part of thorough development initiatives. We are happy to inform the house that we have begun to implement some of the projects that the feasibility study pointed out.

1.1. Likoma Press

The Likoma Press has so far been launched and we have seen its fruits since then. We are so glad to report that we have a dedicated team of staff who, even though are few in number, are capable of performing wonders with limited resources. They demonstrated to us that it's not about money but about dedication to hard work. Those of you who have noticed their work in the printing of the "Bukhu la Mapemphero ndi Nyimbo" know how dedicated they have been. We would like to congratulate Mr. Zgambo and his team for their hard working spirit.

1.2. Mchangabutuwa Property

Our next project is to begin developing our property at Mchangabutuwa, which will be a Conference centre, Hostel, Office and Printing Press. The other space in the office block will host our own radio that we are hoping to establish in the near future. For this project we are currently at a resource mobilisation level. We are looking for donors that do not necessary need to come from the US or UK where we have traditionally looked. Maybe you are that donor who can proudly contribute to the development of this property. It will also motivate our brothers and sisters oversees if they see that

we are also giving out that which is in our hands for the development of this property. Certainly they will be willing to join with us only if we have produced what is in our hands to enable us respond to the call for the mission of God. It is possible. It has to begin with me and you and others. “Expect great things from God. Attempt great things for God.”³ We can do it just like the children of Israel did it as we read in the book of Nehemiah.

In chapter three of the book of Nehemiah we learn, first of all that the people were willing to work for the reconstruction of the wall of Jerusalem. Nehemiah in the wisdom that God gave him, assigned each of them to work building whatever part of the wall was nearest to each of their own houses so that they were personally involved in the work. What can be the amount nearest to your house that you can contribute to this project? What if we can do it this way? If in our Diocese we have 15,000 adult members and out of this number we only have 2000 people who can contribute at least a MK 20,000 per whole year towards this project, how much would that be? Ladies and Gentlemen, we can ably raise MK 40,000,000.00 towards the building fund of this property. Can we call it a 20/2000 campaign. Are you going to be one of them?

2. Vote of thanks

Our initiative to respond to the mission of God has always been a reality because of the support we receive from our international partners, without which we would be less than who we are today. We also would like to thank our partners overseas for their generosity in supporting our initiative in the propagation of the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. We would like to register our gratitude to Bishop Iker and the faithful of the Diocese of Fort Worth for their generosity in fostering the growth that we see in our Diocese. We would also like to thank Bishop David and the faithful of the Diocese of Birmingham in UK, Bishop Love and the Diocese of Albany, Mother Miriam and some other Parishes for the ministry of our Sisters, some individual Parishes across United States and UK such as, The Church of the Good Shepherd, Norfolk, Virginia; Fr. Gimendar and the faithful of St. Mary’s Amityville Long Island; Trinity Wall Street for the funding of the feasibility study and we

³ William Carry in George Smith. [*The Life of William Carey, Shoemaker and Missionary*](#). London: Murray, 1887, ch. 2.

hope that they will also support us in the building of the conference centre; Fr. Chris Rodriguez and the faithful of Trinity Vero Beach; Emmanuel Church, Southern Pine through the ministry of Fr and Mama Liz Davenport; Rev. Conon Greene and the faithful of St. John's Calgary; St. Aldhelm Vulcan Canada and other numerous individuals across the continents. We will also fail our duties if we don't mention Canon Bob Priest and Mama Robyn Priest of the True Awakening for their support to us in the feeding programs in our schools of Msomba, Chilambwe and Mhunju.

We also thank the African Steps for the provision of the Ambulance boat to help with referrals from Likoma and Chizumulu Island. African Steps have lifted us up in the offering of our health services to the people of the neighbourhood of Likoma and Chizumulu Islands in a number of ways. Without their support we would have by now began to ask the communities to pay for the services at our Hospital and Health Centre on Likoma and Chizumulu Islands. We are glad to report that through them the installation of Solar Electricity at the St. Peter's Hospital has been completed. We are very grateful to African Steps for their role in so much of our progress here. They have indeed been our friends in our dire need to provide better health services to the people of the neighbourhood of Likoma Island.

We would also like to thank God for Mama Hellen Timoffee and the friends in Canada for supporting our work on Water, Sanitation and Hygiene for helping us respond to the needs of our people in primary health on water project. We would also like to thank Mr. Rudolf for supporting our work in the building of the Dental Clinic at St. Peter's Hospital Likoma Island.

Without them we would very much be less than anything we have mentioned. The contributions of our own parishes still present challenges. We know that as we ourselves contribute to God's work in our communities, we share in the reward of seeing the work completed. We still need to strive to grow into maturity for us to participate fully in the mission of God.

3. Our Response to the Mission of God

We would now like to return to the beginning of the charge we asked you to consider: the word

“Joy.” Is there joy in what we are doing? Has God perhaps made joy something we are to experience as we go about this hard work? I say with enthusiasm and affirmatively: **Yes!**

Participation in God’s mission to bring mankind into salvation is the core business of the Church all other things are secondary and contingency, so that the people who walked in darkness should see the great light. Upon receiving this great light, which is salvation in Jesus Christ, we are called and sent to participate in the mission of God, through the power of the Holy Spirit. This participation into the mission of God is not only limited to the clergy but the entire church is called upon to respond to the call for mission in their unique way. This is why after every worship service we are sent out with the voice of a deacon to go forth in peace and serve the Lord Hallelujah, Hallelujah.

Limiting service in the church to the ordained ministry of those who are full time Priests has created clericalism and inhibited participation by faithful lay members. This is a primary concern for us and the future of our Diocese. The current system also presents a constant challenge in sustainably training priests: the expenses are simply too costly for most people in poverty stricken areas like Northern Malawi. The result of the current system is a dependent behaviour in which the Diocese can only have a few priests supported by outside partners, who are extremely inadequate for all the churches of the Diocese.

I have seen it happen in my own personal life and I know that same path lies open to others, as they open their hearts to serving. When they do so, they will experience the joy that their lives are truly impacting their local communities, Dioceses and even nation in ways they had never dreamed. Like most of you and most of our current priests in the Diocese, I was once a lay person in our local congregation at St. Peter’s Cathedral on Likoma Island. As a lay person, along with my other lay brothers and sisters, I participated fully in the ministry as a lay Evangelist within the Island and also in the neighbouring Diocese of Nyassa in Mozambique.⁴

Having participated in my early ministry as a lay evangelist during my youth, I experienced what it meant to participate in the mission of God as a lay person without expecting support from the

⁴ Klaus Fiedler, *Missions at the Theology of the Church: An Argument from Malawi*, Mzuzu: Mzuni Press, 2015. p 12. Klaus Fiedler

Parishes but simply enjoyed serving as part of the call to ministry in making disciples. Through this experience and with God's grace, I have had the privilege of learning how to serve God as a lay person with joy. Indeed, throughout Saint Paul's letters he exhorts and encourages the lay Christians and lay teachers to serve with joy, to love and grow, to be joyful always and keep the Word close to our hearts. I believe it is possible for everyone who has a call to do this, given sufficient support in their formation as bi- vocational leaders.

With the Lord's direction and much prayer, we have developed a project that we are so hopeful will create a new model. We are putting it into your hands to discern as one of the motions to this synod reads. The main goal is to create excitement, energy and a new system that will enable a new, healthier ministry structure for the Diocese at every local church. In doing so, those churches that do not have a priest every Sunday can effectively be served by, an enthusiastic lay apostolate functioning as pastors within the Anglican ethos, without receiving financial compensation from the Parish.

Through this ministry, we hope to encourage those who are Spirit filled and are hearing the calling from God into ministry to fully participate in the mission of God while functioning as pastors. As they carry out their apostolate they will not be asking for a stipend from the Parishes because they are engaged in other business or employment for their living. One does not need to be a clergy to participate in the mission of God but some can be called in different ministries as gifted pastors, evangelist, and teachers etc. (Eph. 4:11-13). We can learn from the ministry of the Church Army in how we can respond to the call for the mission of God. We are very grateful to the Church Army for training our captains who will spearhead this call for the mission of God. It is very much possible for the entire church to respond to this call into the mission of God.

This initiative intends to provide that support for those who have a call to serve God while they live their life in the community as lay people so that they can with joy participate in the mission of God. We need to develop alternative ministerial options to supplement the itinerant ministry of the priests we currently have. Before the time comes when we have to face this reality of not having enough

resources to do so, we need to prepare the soil with an alternative ministry. As such we are for a time being stopping recruiting young people for training into priesthood and we are going to focus on training lay ministers and developing the academic specialisation of the current number of priests and deacons we have.

We will be fulfilling this ministry with the privilege of having been bishop of this Diocese for six years. As the Diocesan leader, these years have been challenging in raising the income locally which is needed for monthly stipends of the clergy, apart from the support we have from our brothers and sisters overseas who are generously participating in this mission (87% of the Diocesan Budget). We would like to see a new generation of people who will take charge of their own affairs. A generation that will take the leading role in a Diocese that is ready to be a church, that lives out its teaching and that grows into maturity in its relationships with the Lord and others; a church that is growing into maturity through stewardship and active in their bi-vocational ministry. Then we can become a church of people whose faith is attractive to others and who radiate love, courage and the grace of God in demonstrating the power of the reign of God.

4. Mission of God

It is always the mission of God and not our mission. Since the fall of mankind in Adam, all have fallen and fall short of the glory of God. It has always been impossible for human beings to reach out to God on our own without His initiative in first reaching out to us. The problem of human sin and its consequences resulted in the breach between human beings and God. The mission to undo the dire effects of sin, to bring reconciliation between us and God, and to extend that reconciliation to all creation, requires the greater to reach out to the lesser offender. In the book of Genesis God in his eternal love reached out to man by declaring redemption of human beings through the seed of a woman who was going to destroy the authority of evil (Genesis 3:16). After the fall, it was impossible to overcome sin and its results on our own “But with God, everything is possible” (Matt 19:26). And God has chosen us to participate in his mission for his own sake so that through this call

we are part of His agenda in the mission of His Kingdom.

In the Biblical narrative God called the people of Israel as people between the times for the mission of his reconciliation with the world.⁵ This history of our salvation reached its consummation in the Lord Jesus Christ who is the propitiation of our sins, the completion of the narrative from the Old Testament to the New Testament. We are now the people in between times to radiate the light of God into the darkness of this world.

5. Church as Apostolate

The word “church” translated from the word “ecclesia” has been misrepresented. It is not a building or place to which we go, but the people of God sent to participate in an apostolate. Apostolate is an action word meaning doing the work of the sent one. God has designed so that the people called out into the world in the Lord Jesus Christ would be a “missional” fellowship. The word “mission” comes from the Latin word *missio*, which means “having been sent.” Since we have been sent to do God’s work, we are a “missional” community together.⁶ Not only the clergy are called but the whole community of faith is called upon to do the work of the sent one into the world.

However very often the word mission, has also been misrepresented in the use of language by construing “missionaries” as those from foreign countries like United Kingdom or America to Africans. But this language has sometimes obscured the fundamental missional calling of the whole church together and every individual member. If we think of ourselves primarily as sending others away to do “missions,” then we may forget that we also have been sent by God into our particular segment of the world to fulfil God’s mission right where we are, even as we share in the global mission of God through the power of the Holy Spirit.

No matter what education we can receive during our training, no matter how we will present our catechesis, to melt the heart of the sinners requires the Holy Spirit alone. We seek to be attentive to the will of God in His spontaneous calling to support those lay people to function as pastors in the

⁵ James V. Brownson Et al. *Storm Front: The Good News of God*. Grand Rapids: William B Eerdmans, 2003. 20.

⁶ Darrell Guder. At al. *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in Northern America*. Rapids: William B Eerdmans, 1998.

areas where there is not an ordained professional priest. We will then seek to train such individuals so as to enable them participate fully in telling the story of the Kingdom of God and forming the new community with its cultures influenced by the power of the gospel.

6. Vocation in the Mission of God

Although it is the “Missio Dei”, God in his own prerogative has invited us to participate with him in His mission of telling the story of His Kingdom until the end of time. Each person’s vocation flows from the grace of Baptism, which is affirmed on the day of confirmation by the power of the Holy Spirit into the notion of the priesthood of all believers (1 Peter 2:5). God has given us different gifts for doing certain things well (Romans 12:6-8). Each one of us, in the body of Christ has been given a particular gift such as the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers to equip God’s people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ. It is therefore a call for each one of us to discover our vocation through prayer, reflection and discussion as to how God calls each person to love Him. Some can be called into the religious life as our Sisters, some as lay pastors and also just as a faithful member of the Church to participate in the mission of God.

It is my sincere hope and plan at this time that we will draw greatly upon the teachings and spiritual practices written and advocated by St. Benedict in the 1300s. I am inspired by St. Benedict because he developed spiritual practices for lay ministers that are still applicable and relevant today. His writings convey his grasp that through the spiritual disciplines of reading the Psalms and through prayer, we better shine as little lights of Christ. Benedict experienced and knew that through daily, disciplined reading and meditating on the Word, energizing our lives with the joy and thanksgiving that the Gospel brings, truly transforming our mundane, day in, day out ordinary lives into purpose-filled, joy-filled lives. I am excited about the prospect of an entirely new group of lay ministers who seek and find the Lord through practicing Benedict’s disciplines in seeking Christ, and are able to convey, teach, inspire and encourage their communities with that same transformative, victorious light of Christ.

As a Diocese, while we learn the new members and continue to participate in the mission of God,

prioritizing evangelization, enculturation, dialogue, pastoral care and the means of social communication with the current ministry of the threefold order of bishop, priest and deacon, we need to discern how we can expand this participation. Since by Christ's will the Church is by her nature missionary, the Church can continue to be the light of the world and salt of the earth (the fertilizer of the earth) and remain a community where these works of evangelization are happening in which the vocation of every member of the Diocese is encouraged. It is in the light of this background that we need to re-examine our ecclesiastical polity so as to bring about an increased participation in the apostolate of all the members of the Diocese particularly those lay people with spontaneous gifts to perform as pastors in order to support the mission of the current itinerant priests which is the primary concern of this charge.

7. Conclusion

We are calling upon you my brothers and sisters in the Lord to respond fully to the call of God for missions and our quest for growth into maturity. Through what is in our hands, God is inviting us to participate fully in His Mission. Are you willing to follow his voice and give generously to the work of His mission? I leave it to you for actions but I am beginning to take the first step to move forward by faith in God.

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