

Keynote Address
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delivered by
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When Christian young people gather together as you are doing at this time, there will be experiences of sharing ideas, comparing efforts of sharing the faith, and trying to understand a bit more about being young and being Christian. And of course, the usual 'catching up' talk.

You will of course have to relate the hectic cell phone activities and other activities with your electronic equipment to being here for a specific purpose: to relate your faith as young people to the many things that impact upon you: Family, friends, Church, school, work, Facebook, Twitter, and many more. I am sure that many of you will make some friends for life.

You will also, I am sure, seek to relate being young to being Christian. This is an exercise that you cannot neglect or ignore. It is an effort to find significance and purpose in life guided by Christian principles.

It is in fact about connecting the set of values we find in Christianity to life, to real life in this world. It is about being aware of who we are and where we are on the Christian journey, being conscious of where we ought to be.

There always seems to be a gap between where we are in life and where we want to be, indeed where we ought to be. Not even St. Paul was immune to this. In Rom 7: 19 we hear him saying:

For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do.

This gap between where we are and where we ought to be, is highlighted in the teachings of Jesus especially in the Sermon on the Mount. Here in this important section of Jesus' teaching, we find a large collection of Christian values. In relation to a number of accepted patterns of behaviour, we read of Jesus saying in Matt 5:

You have heard that it was said..... Stating where we are, and,

But I say.....pointing to where we ought to be

We live life between these two points. The Church following the teachings of Jesus keeps saying to us:

Do not get stuck where you are, keep pushing to reach where you ought to be.

So in Matt 5: 38 Jesus says

You have heard that it was said..... you shall love your neighbour and hate your enemies. But I say....love your enemies.....

The invitation is one to cross over from hate, spite and revenge, to a condition of love.

This call to cross over from where we are to where we ought to be is a call that is at the very heart of the Christian message. It applies to all areas of life. It is put to work and seen at work most of all, when we use it as our guide for our Christian journey as we pursue the Christian ideals set out for us by our Lord.

These ideals are related to all areas of life. We believe as Anglicans that God wants us to relate our Christian beliefs to every area of our life, to our personal issues, to the issues of our communities, to the issues of the world.

It is like having a comprehensive package called life with all the different and difficult pieces, some of which do not seem to fit together, but we try to hold them together being convinced that God can relate to all of them. We can hold this belief because Jesus surely did and shared it with His disciples.

We follow the example of Jesus who in His ministry treated everyone as a child of God. He taught that God cared for the birds and the grass, the environment. All were His creation and were embraced with His love.

Anglicans take this understanding of God's relationship with us very seriously. We are a worldly people. In other words, we treat the whole world as special to God and every human being as a Child of God.

We try not to divide God's world into bits that are more important and bits that are less important to him. When we do so, we draw people into the mix and then claim that there are some people in the world who are more important than others.

The sea of deaths that we are witnessing at the hand of extremists in the world is built on the assumption that some people can be destroyed. All for what those who do so, see as a justifiable cause.

We are also witnessing at this time, what seems to be another racial melt down in the USA. There are those who are saying that in that society, Black people are treated in a different way from White people. Black lives do not matter, they claim. There is an abundance of evidence to support this claim.

But this type of discrimination leads us to a very slippery slope, where we draw God in on our side to support our prejudices, and claim that he loves some of his children far more than he loves others.

We reject this understanding of our relationship to God and God's relationship to the world. We believe that God loves his entire world in spite of all its faults. He is connected to all the pieces.

This belief has led the Anglican Church to formulate the Five Marks of Mission that emphasise the comprehensive love of God that we are called to imitate.

This important understanding of how we relate our faith to the world, to the issues of life is one that can help you as young people to live active and effective Christian lives.

Doing so according to the Five Marks of Mission calls for the type of commitment to the issues they raise in a manner that can lead to transformation and change.

The Marks of Mission remind us that as Christians, and especially as Anglicans of the comprehensive nature of our task as we seek to follow the Christian way.

The Five Marks are:

- *To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom*
- *To teach, baptize and nurture new believers*
- *To respond to human need by loving service*
- *To transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation*
- *To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth*

The Good News of the Kingdom tells of possibilities. It holds up before us a string of possibilities and issues the call: Go after them. It declares that we are capable of doing some great things that can transform lives. These are primarily about relationships.

Jesus provides the examples for us that touch on many areas of life.

There is the area of family relationships illustrated by the parable of the Prodigal Son. The issue here is the restoration of broken family relationships. There are three sides to the story:

1. Doing something that hurt someone, a member of our family
2. Admission of error and asking for forgiveness
3. The acceptance of the apology and offering forgiveness

Because we are frail, mortal and human, the first action will take place. We can easily hurt and offend by what we say, or by what we do. This is why we need the second and the third points mentioned above. Our relationships will only work if they are present. They are also central to our relationship with God.

When we can create and sustain loving, supportive relationships, by offering and accepting forgiveness, we are reflecting the type of life that is pleasing to God. We are showing that it is possible in spite of the challenges of human nature to do so. There is no better way of proclaiming the Good News of the Kingdom.

Think of your relationships: Those with your family, your friends, your congregation, your work mates, your school friends. Imagine that one of them behaving like the Prodigal son, and does something that really hurts you. But they regret their action, come to you later, asking for forgiveness. How would you respond? If you respond like the father of the Prodigal Son, and accept their apology, you would be proclaiming the Good News of the Kingdom. You would be demonstrating that it is possible to forgive someone who has offended us.

This brings the Good News of the kingdom to our level. It is a message we share by putting into practice what we claim to believe about the goodness and grace of God. According to the teachings of Jesus, there is no better way to proclaim the Good News than through strong relationships that have a powerful, active element, which is the power to forgive. Jesus emphasised the absolute necessity of this power if we are to be children of the Kingdom.

A lot of the violence that we see ripping communities apart in this region, is there because a lot of young people like you and some older ones as well do not have a forgiveness app working in their psyche.

If we are going to be good and effective proclaimers of the Good News, we must make sure that there is a large space for forgiveness in our relationships. This would surely be a very

good way we could share the Gospel message of Good News of the One who placed forgiveness at the centre of His ministry.

The second Mark of Mission calls upon us to :

- ***To teach, baptize and nurture new believers***

You may say right away, 'This is the work of the priest'. Some of it, like baptism, surely is. But the other activities are for priests and laity, young and old.

If you cannot baptise you can surely help to teach and nurture new believers. You can teach not necessarily in a formal structured way, like in Sunday School, a Confirmation Class or a Bible Study, but in informal ways.

One of the best ways of doing so is by being a good example of Christian living. We are the best examples when we are kind, when we lend a helping hand to someone, and when we offer words of encouragement to persons who may be going through a difficult time in life. We are excellent examples when we stay clear of saying bad and hurtful things about other persons.

By doing all this, you will be teaching by example. You may draw someone to the faith. Someone may be influenced to live the Christian life.

The Christian life is surely about being aware of the third Mark of Mission that calls upon us

- ***To respond to human need by loving service***

When I was a tutor at Codrington College some years ago, I tried to instil in the minds of the ordinands, that effective ministry especially that practised in a parish, is 99.9% about how the clergy relate to people. If you cannot get the people relationship side of things right, then our ministry will be shallow and disconnected.

This is also true for every Christian. I hold this view because Christianity is people centred. The Gospels show that this was the understanding of Jesus in His ministry. The welfare of people was always there at the heart of His ministry.

So the call to

To respond to human need by loving service,

is a call that reflects the ministry of Jesus. It captures a people centered understanding of Christianity.

It is one that has to be nurtured. It does not mean we will relate to everyone in the same way. Our personalities connect to other personalities in different ways. But the Christian bottom line in terms of our relationships, is that we treat each person as if we truly believe that he/she, like us, is a child of God.

This is the platform on which we stand as we seek

To respond to human need by loving service.

There can be a variety of needs. We should not get stuck on physical things like, food, clothing, shelter etc, as important as these are. We respond to these needs but there are several others that we can easily overlook.

Sometimes, one of the greatest human needs is having a friend in whom we can confide. Someone with whom to share our thoughts and concerns, knowing that what we say is not going beyond them.

In the world of Facebook and Twitter and WhatsApp, that seems to be governed by a belief that everyone should know, indeed, has a right to know everything about everyone else, we can be made to feel odd and wrong if we do not share everything about ourselves, everything we know about someone, with everyone else.

We may be tempted to share everything someone tells us in confidence about themselves with another person. There is a lot of pressure to do so at your age.

Remember the call of the mark of mission to respond to human need by loving service. Sometimes the human need is having someone to hear our story in confidence. Sometimes the loving service may simply be keeping the confidence of a friend.

Keeping Confidence is fast becoming an endangered practice. Stem the tide and help it to survive. As young people you have a lot of things in common. You will discuss and share a lot of things. But learn to respect each other's privacy. Learn to keep confidence.

In the exciting electronic world of sharing, stay far away from spreading the type of information about someone that damages and hurts. There is far too much of this around.

There are a lot of cowards who hide behind the covering and anonymity of cyber space and

inflict their damage upon many good and innocent persons. There are far too many of us in the world who only seem to feel good if someone is feeling bad. Do not join the group.

Use the great electronic gifts and marvels of our time

To respond to human need by loving service.

Use them to build persons up, to encourage them to be better, to share with them your experiences of the Good News. Use them to offer support to those who need it.

The fourth Mark of Mission encourages us

- ***To seek to transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and to pursue peace and reconciliation***

We may not be able to dismantle all the unjust structures of society but at least we may be able not to make them stronger.

Do not think of these unjust structures simply in terms of the institutions of government, business or even the Church. Think of them in terms of how the welfare of small vulnerable people can be ignored.

Think of them in terms of how the power that is exercised in society can sometimes be managed in a way that does not assist the weak and vulnerable as much as it should.

We can respond to this by taking a look at how power is being used in our groups. If we hold any office in our group, are we exercising our authority in a manner that can be a model for others?

We can do something about the unjust structures of society by showing that it is possible to use our resources and power to help and support others, especially the weak and vulnerable.

This Mark of Mission also asks us to challenge violence and to pursue peace. In a world where violence in all its many manifestations seems to be everywhere, as Christians we have to keep believing in the possibility of peace.

Peace is at the centre of the Christian message. We are expected to be peace makers, to be instruments of God's peace. We proclaim Jesus as the Prince of Peace.

Peace is central to our Christian lives. But it is not an abstract idea. It is about real life experiences. It is about its opposite: the waves of violence that engulf many of the communities in our region.

In this context the way of peace becomes the Christian alternative to the way of violence. That this violence seems to be inflicted by young people - young men - upon other young men suggests that the youth element is a critical factor.

As young Christians who are committed to the way of peace and worship the Prince of Peace, you need to make a contribution to efforts to rescue other young persons from the way of violence. But how can you do so? Let me suggest three ways.

First of all you need to be convinced that violence as we are experiencing it among our youth cannot produce the type of future that our youth deserve. As Christian youth you must see it as totally against the way of Jesus, the Prince of Peace.

Demonstrate by the way you deal with conflict in your lives that the way of peace is still a viable Christian alternative to the way of violence. This calls for the courage to denounce violence and ensure that it does not influence your thinking and your relationships.

Secondly, engage with those young persons who seem prone to the use of violence. Use Facebook etc to share messages of peace. Push peace and denounce violence.

Thirdly use your youth group as a forum where the alternatives to violence programmes like the Conflict Resolution approach to conflict are discussed and put to work.

This approach was of course proclaimed by Jesus in his ministry nearly two thousand years ago. He encouraged his followers not to become consumed by violence. Turning the other cheek and going the extra mile was his advice.

Do not let the passion for revenge, the eye for eye and tooth for tooth approach, control and guide your life. Do the extra to avoid conflict and violence, like going the extra mile, giving coat and cloak. This revolutionary approach to violence is one that understands that if it is not brought under control it can consume both victim and perpetrator.

I have dwelt on this issue because I believe young people can be the greatest influence upon other young people in stemming the cancer of violence that is destroying far too many of our young people, especially our young men.

Our courts are filled each week with a parade of young men who seemed to have

disconnected from the moral underpinnings of life that speak of the value of human life. The numbers are too alarming just to write them off as 'bad boys'.

The sociologists and the psychologists will provide us with researched professional interpretations of the trend. But we cannot ignore that these young people take conscious decisions to behave in a given way and are fully aware that this way is not the right one. In this context a group of Christian youth must live out the alternatives to violence. Use every opportunity you can to demonstrate that violence is not an alternative for you and should not be for other persons. Make a commitment in this gathering to guide some young person who seems prone to violence away from this way, to the way of peace.

We are becoming more and more aware that any Christian effort to share peace involves being fully aware of the many things that threatened and destroy peace. And the things that create the greatest threats are the availability of essential things we need to sustain us. When we are short of our basic supplies that we need for survival, we panic.

We are sustained by the things of this earth, food, water, air. We are spiritually uplifted by the beauty of the natural world, moved by a sunset, the lapping of the waves, the music of the birds, the sound of running water. We need them all for a pleasant, wholesome life.

Groups have been fighting and killing each other from the dawn of time to control these resources and so control other people. We learn from our history that the countries of this region have been caught in the wars of the European nations as they fought to control the resources of this region.

Religion takes the ownership of the essentials of life out of human hands and set them firmly in the hands of God. The creation stories of the Old Testament and Our Lord's miracles in the New Testament are doing just this. We celebrate this in our harvest festivals each year.

The fifth Mark of Mission seeks to highlight this divine ownership by asking us

- ***To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth***

If we maintain God's ownership of his creation seeing ourselves as its stewards, then we must accept our responsibility to take good care of God's great gift.

I have just return from a consultation in Fiji sponsored by the Anglican Mission organisation called the USPG. The islands of Fiji are some of the most beautiful in the

world, but also the most vulnerable. Earlier this year a typhoon - their hurricane - destroyed a lot of the housing on one of the islands.

The consultation paid a lot of attention to climate change, one of the factors responsible for much of the severe weather we are seeing. It is believed that our lack of care for the environment is one of the major factors affecting climate change.

Our church in this Province has responded to the Climate Change challenge. Clifton Nedd, with the assistance of the Anglican Alliance is working to sensitise the Province about the problems that climate change can create.

We have in the Caribbean, one of the most beautiful and exotic bits of God's great gift of creation. The hills and mountains and the luscious fruitful valleys. The sea and the sun. The sunset and the enchanting moonlight. We do live in paradise. Others come in their thousands to share our experience of paradise.

But it is fragile. Very, very fragile. One strong hurricane, excessive rainfall, extended drought, pollution of any type and our paradise is under threat.

The Fifth Mark of Mission reminds us of our responsibility to maintain this great gift of God. It also asks us to determine on which side of the divide we stand in relation to our environment, God's creation.

Do we stand on the side that works?

.....to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth

Or do we stand on the other side that contributed to its pollution and destruction?

We can pull all this down from the clouds and relate it to our lives. We can relate it, for example, to how we manage the refuse and garbage that we generate.

Do we act irresponsibly and litter and dump with the consequential effects, or do we make a special effort to live up to our responsibility as stewards of God's creation?

How do we manage materials like plastics that can clutter up the water ways, find their way into the sea and threatened some forms of marine life?

How conscious are we of the endangered species that are in our country?

What is our approach to water usage? Do we see it as a resource of endless supply or one that we have to carefully manage?

And the questions can go on.

I would like you as young people to become very conscious of your responsibility for the environment, God's creation.

In each of your groups in your parishes, pay some attention to this. Set out a plan on how you can make your group, your family and friends and your congregation far more environmentally conscious and responsible.

You and your generation constitute the future of this region. It will be far better able to sustain your generation and those to follow if you take your responsibility for the environment very seriously.

Conclusion

The Marks of Mission therefore help us to ground our faith in the experiences of life, the experiences of our lives. They remind us that to be Christian is to be alert and active, demonstrating at all times that the many experiences and pieces of life, pieces that may at sometimes seem like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle, are all connected to God.

The puzzle may seem far more complicated than it really is at your age. This is the challenge and the excitement of youth. But the bits hold together. They hold because of our faith in God our creator and Sustainer. As Christians we believe that all the varied and odd pieces of Our Lord's life were connected to God. God was present even when He seemed to be absent.

His birth and His death, the heights of the mountain of transfiguration, and the depths of Gethsemane, the love and affection of the woman who anointed Him and the denial of His best friend Peter who abandoned Him, all hang together in His life and are like a mosaic of contrasting pieces in which God was present, was at work and was in control.

The varied experiences of our lives do the same. At this transition stage of youth, enjoy the stage but prepare for the next one.

The Marks of Mission remind us of what is necessary as we move from stage to stage in life, following the Christian path. From each Mark can emerge a commitment:

- *To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom*

Make a commitment to proclaim the Good News through sharing good and positive things that reflect the grace of God

- *To teach, baptize and nurture new believers*

Engage all whom you can about the transforming power of the Gospel message by being a model of Christian living

- *To respond to human need by loving service*

In your lives strengthen the Christian practice of caring for others

- *To transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation*

Be an agent of peace and a champion of justice

- *To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth*

Do not litter and do all you can to protect our fragile environment

With these commitments on board and active in your lives, you can make a significant difference in our region.

May God continue to bless each of you as you follow his path now in the days of your youth. I am sure He will strengthen and guide as you engage in the great Christian tasks so well set out in the Five Marks of Mission.