

**THE SEVENTH CHARGE OF THE RIGHT REVEREND MICHAEL MAXWELL
BISHOP OF BARBADOS
DELIVERED IN THE CATHEDRAL CHURCH OF ST MICHAEL AND ALL ANGELS
ON PENTECOST SUNDAY, JUNE 8, 2025.**

BIDDING PRAYER

You shall pray for Christ's Holy Catholic Church, that is, for the whole congregation of Christian people dispersed throughout the world, and especially, for the Church in the Province of the West Indies.

You shall pray for Sandra, our President, Mia, our Prime Minister, and other members of Parliament, and for all in positions of public trust and authority.

You shall pray for all ministers of God's Holy Word and Sacraments, for Philip our Senior Bishop, for other bishops the Church in the Province of the West Indies and especially for me, Bishop of this Diocese; for the Dean and Chapter of this Cathedral Church, for other clergy and laity, especially those chosen to assist in the affairs of this Diocese.

You shall pray for the people of this nation and Diocese that all may live to the glory of God and in love one towards another.

Finally, let us praise God for those who have departed this life in His faith and fear, and pray that we may have grace to live after their good example that when this life is ended, we may be partakers with them of the glorious Resurrection in the life everlasting.

All this we ask through Jesus Christ Our Lord. Amen.

WELCOME & INTRODUCTION

I wish to begin by joining the Dean in welcoming and acknowledging the presence of our President, the Most Honourable Dame Sandra Mason, The President of the Senate, His Honour Reginald Farley, The Leader of the Opposition, The Honourable Ralph Thorne, The Chair of the Barbados Christian Council, The Rev'd. Dr. Cicely Horsford; The Deputy Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Labour, Social Partnership and the Third Sector (with special responsibility for Ecclesiastical Affairs), Ms Faye Prescod, The Provincial Secretary, Mrs. Eleanor Lawrence; other specially invited guests, brothers and sisters of the Clergy, Lay Delegates and spouses, Executive Councils of our Diocesan Ministries and Organizations, other fellow Anglicans, friends, members of the press and well-wishers gathered and those who have joined us through the live streaming services of our Anglican Media Team. Welcome on this Pentecost Sunday to this special service that signals the commencement of this year's Annual Synod.

This Year's Synod takes place at a pivotal time in our Church's history when our Diocese culminates its Bicentennial celebrations during this month of June and prepares to step into its 201st year of mission and ministry; and then, within six months' time, we move into the 2nd quarter of this 21st Century. While observing our Bicentennial year, we celebrated the fact that we are still standing despite our coloured past, despite the many challenges and obstacles we had to overcome and the changes we had to embrace in order to be the Diocese we are today. We also celebrated the various levels of past ministry that contributed to our nation's development during the post-emancipation era until now; while at the same time, in sober reflection, expressed our sincere regret for the earlier period when the Anglican Church in this nation

participated in the inhumane system of slavery. However, we also emphasized the salient point that while we are still standing, we are not called to stand still, for God desires us to actively, faithfully and wholistically respond to the needs of our people whose nation, and the wider world, has significantly changed religiously, morally, socio-culturally, economically, politically, technologically, and environmentally within the first quarter of this millennium. That being the case, we meet at this Synod, under the theme “God’s Missional Church: Looking Upward, Searching Inward, Moving Outward.” This theme invites us to continue our contemplation on the way forward by critically examining our levels of connection with our Divine Creator, with each other as a community of believers – our level of stewardship, and with the community and nation we are called to serve, as we seek to further strengthen, enrich and advance our response to God’s call in being His Missional Church.

THE CELEBRATION OF PENTECOST

Annually, on this the fiftieth day after Easter observed as Pentecost Sunday, the Christian Church is invited to celebrate and commemorate that great outpouring and offering of God’s Holy Spirit upon the first followers of His Son, Jesus Christ. In filling these men and women with the gift of His Holy Spirit, our God established a deeper, more personal connection with them, further transformed their lives to be the body of Christ, and empowered them to connect and share the gospel with the wider community to whom they were called to serve in response to Jesus’ commission “as the father has sent me even so I send you.”

In our church services this morning, we heard the account of this outpouring of God’s Holy Spirit shared within our reading from the Acts of the Apostles, chapter 2. There we heard of how the apostles, while huddled in the upper room and presumably in prayer on that Feast of Pentecost, had the awesome experience of receiving God’s Holy Spirit and being transformed and inspired to boldly declare, in various languages, the wonderful deeds of God as the Spirit gave them utterance. While this was happening, we are told that many who were from various regions and in the city for the Jewish festival, as they heard these disciples proclaiming the **goodness of God** in their native languages, drew near in amazement and wondered what was taking place. Then the Spirit led Peter, supported by his fellow disciples standing united by his side, to address those on the outside and inform them that God was fulfilling His promise to outpour His Spirit upon all flesh. Not part of our reading this morning, but found later in that chapter two, after what is considered Peter’s first sermon and his call for them to “save [themselves] from this corrupt generation”, we are told that some three thousand persons welcomed his message, were baptized in the name of Jesus and devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching, to the fellowship, the breaking of bread and the prayers.

That is why we joyously celebrate this Feast of Pentecost for it was on that day in history that God gave birth to His Missional Church. On this day we thank God that, through the presence and work of His Spirit within those first disciples, they were inspired and empowered to respond to the mission for which Jesus had charged them, the great commission to go, baptize and teach people of every nation all that he had taught them about the way of love – about loving God, loving self and loving others the way he (Jesus) loved. It is also because of the infusing of their lives with the Holy Spirit, and being stirred to engage in God’s mission of building up His Kingdom, that we now stand as members of His Church today to continue that very mission of kingdom building within this nation as a Diocese.

On this Pentecost Sunday, with all that this day calls us as a Universal Church to commemorate and celebrate, it is no better day and time for us in this Diocese to commence our Annual Synod in prayer and worship, and to **hear what the Spirit is saying to the Church** as to where we are at and where we need to go if we are to continue to be God’s Missional Church within our nation today. It is no better time to pray that God, through His Holy Spirit, will enable us to have and see the vision He desires us to pursue as His Church in terms of our connectivity and relationship with Him, with each other in the body of Christ, and

with all the peoples of this nation for whom we are called to serve. Our Synod summons us at this time to see the vision God desires us to pursue as we look upward, search inward and prepare ourselves to move outward.

VISIONS FROM GOD TO ISAIAH, JOHN AND HIS CHURCH TODAY

We serve a God who gives His people visions; visions to enable them to know Him and His purposes more fully and to inspire them to pursue His paths and play their part in His mission of salvation. He offers visions to build faith, create hope and help us to trust Him especially during difficult times. He gave visions to people like Abraham of becoming a great nation, Joseph of his rise to prominence, Moses of being called to lead, Ezekiel of the dry bones, Mary and Joseph of the birth of Jesus, Peter of his ministry to Cornelius and Paul of his conversion and missionary call. In giving these visions, God was enabling these persons to work His plan. In our Old Testament and New Testament readings for this Synod Service, we heard of two other persons who received visions.

In the Old Testament reading from Isaiah chapter 6, we heard of the time when Isaiah received a vision from God that led him to sense a call to which he responded: **‘Here am I; send me!’** Isaiah dates this vision in the year that King Uzziah died, which I believe was his way of emphasizing that it occurred at a time of transition, a time when things were about to get worse than they may already have been. Yet in the midst of it all, God, through the vision, made His presence known to Isaiah that He was still on the throne even though things were beginning to look bleak and dismal for the people of Israel. In offering that vision, God invited Isaiah to turn his attention to the throne of God, to look upward to Him in light of all that was taking place or about to take place in the world, and enter into that space of worship with the heavenly host to experience and acknowledge God’s holiness, God’s presence with him and to hear His voice. While in that holy space of worship, that was filled with reverberating praises to God on high, Isaiah is then brought to that place of searching inward and expresses his need of God’s help for direction and a remorse in terms of his unworthiness and that of the community among whom he lived. That search inward and confession during that worship led him to receive the assurance of his life being cleansed and transformed to the point of being open to be guided towards a great purpose for God, for we are essentially told that God provided the means through which that was made possible through the assistance of one of His Seraphs. That vision given to Isaiah also enabled him to become conscious of God’s quest for faithful agents to go for Him and do His bidding, to spread His Word, to inform the nation of His will and transform lives for His Kingdom. It is then that we heard of Isaiah’s commitment to move out on God’s behalf as he responded with the words ‘Here am I; send me!’

It is this level of vision I believe God wants for us to have and experience as members of this year’s body of Synod, and collectively as a Diocese. A vision that invites us to look upwards to Him, as we worship Him, and acknowledge Him for who He is regardless of the current experiences in our lives today. A vision that beckons us to search inwardly and recognize those areas where we and others have fallen short, to receive the assistance God provides through His Holy Spirit to bring about the transformation of our lives as a worshipping community. And a vision that inspires us to move outwards, as agents of God and ambassadors for Christ, to do His bidding, to be the light and salt of the earth, to be His voice, His hands, His feet as His “Sent” Church, His Missional Church with the divine commission of helping and inviting others – be they our family members, friends, neighbours, school or work mates, and even absolute strangers - to live their best selves as disciples of Christ. I will say more on this later, in terms of God’s vision that bids us to look upward, search inward and move outward as His Missional Church; but before doing so, let me also share a bit on the other vision noted within our New Testament reading.

In the passage from the Revelation to John, Chapter 2, we heard John accounting for a time when he, while in the Spirit on the Lord's Day, received a vision from the Lord that began with an assessment of seven churches in Asia. We heard about three of those seven churches in today's reading – the churches in Ephesus, Smyrna and Pergamum. Here he told of what the Spirit was saying about and to those churches, of the areas for which they were to be commended and in some cases those areas that needed to be repented of or avoided so that they may be found faithful. For the Church in Ephesus, they were commended for their hard work in maintaining the Church, in spreading the gospel, in rooting out evil and false teachings, standing for sound doctrine, seeking orthodox teachers and holding fast to the Christian traditions; but in all their firmness to guard the truth and protect the Church from the contamination of the faith, they had lost the love they first had for all God's people, that of embracing, serving, transforming and uplifting them – whether friend or foe. Then the Church in Smyrna was commended for still standing, standing rich in God's grace and favour even though they were afflicted by poverty - being economically poor, afflicted by threats of imprisonment and afflicted by slanderous comments made by some who called themselves Jews - children of God; but the Spirit had to exhort that Church family not to fear what man may do to them but to remain faithful, steadfast, unmovable, for God has not given them a spirit of fear. The Spirit then revealed to John the status of the Church in Pergamum, who found itself placed in a pluralistic society with many polytheistic faiths where there was the worship of various gods and idols; and that Church was commended for its faithfulness in not being lured into those practices and for not denying their faith in their Lord and Saviour when placed under pressure; but they were warned about some in their Church who wanted the "best of both worlds;" to serve God and mammon too, to worship God in Christ Jesus while paying homage to other gods and pursuing treasures both in heaven and on earth.

Through this vision given to John, God was ultimately revealing that through His Spirit, He desires to point His Church on the path of faithfulness and righteousness, amid the various challenges, trials and temptations that may come its way. I'm certain that, as we meet for this year's Synod, He calls us now to be open like John to the Spirit and allow Him to give us a clear vision of where our Anglican Church is at, to commend the positives we have achieved and to call us to transform those aspects that are not measuring up to our being the Church He desires us to be. **His charge** is for us to remain focused, or regain focus, **on His divine purpose for His Church**, being guided by His indwelling Spirit. Let us therefore pray for our Church at this time, that as Synod meets on Tuesday and Wednesday, we will receive that clearer vision, **God's vision**, by hearing what the Spirit is saying to us through the process of looking upward to God, searching inward to be transformed by Him and moving outward as His commissioned agents in touching other lives within this nation that currently isn't well physically, spiritually, socially, emotionally or economically.

LOOKING UPWARD TO RECEIVE AND FOCUS ON GOD'S VISION

Now to be God's Missional Church empowered to respond to our nation at this time, it all begins with us responding to His call to a life of worship, that of looking upward towards Him figuratively, that of spending time in His presence, communing regularly to sustain our connection, commitment and relationship with Him. It is therefore imperative for our Anglican Church to provide that channel, that pathway, that sacred space whereby its congregants, of various ages and stages, are welcomed and inspired to connect with God and be moved by His presence. In the same way Isaiah was moved to look up and experience the presence of God and to hear His voice in what is interpreted as a time of worship within the temple of Jerusalem, so too our churches are to provide such an atmosphere and space that inspires us to encounter and hear from God and deepen our relationship and connection with Him. The time spent worshipping in those sacred spaces is to fortify us so that when our services close with the commission "Go in peace and serve the Lord" we can say like the psalmist today, whether as a child, a youth, an adult or a senior citizen, "I was glad when they said unto me, let us go to the house of the Lord."

The reality is that we all don't encounter God through the same means, for some of us are drawn to have a tangible experience of Him through the traditional worship styles while others are drawn through contemporary or indigenous forms of worship; some through the preached Word in order to hear God speaking to them while others through quiet meditation; some through the smells and bells and ancient rituals that stimulate their senses while others are simply drawn to that spiritual connection through stained glass windows and images that enable reflection on God still being on the throne, still master of everything, still available to us and loves us unconditionally. To be God's Missional Church seeking to provide men and women, boys and girls that sacred space to connect with God and to hear from Him concerning His vision and will for each of our lives, we must open ourselves to hear what the Spirit is saying, or continues to say, to us concerning our liturgies and the mediums used to inspire personal and communal prayer and worship, whether in-person or online. This year's Synod will seek to do just that through one of its three forums on Wednesday that will focus on the spirit and style of our prayer life and worship, the medium of streaming our services and the possible call for a more blended or mixed approach to worship. The forum will consider the mediums of devotion being offered to assess how they resonate with persons and determine whether there is a need for further development to nurture greater spiritual awareness of God and a deeper connection and commitment to Him. This was previously mentioned within our Mission Action Plan 2022-2024; and during the Lenten period last year, our Youth Department introduced some methods of prayer to some of our youth from across our Diocese, such as centering prayer, prayer art, prayer beads and labyrinth meditation; and The Liturgy, Spirituality and Music Commission coordinated an in-depth course on Centering Prayer with Mrs Celpha Sands as the facilitator. So you can see that we have already started to introduce or re-introduce some devotional methods to our members, the young and the not-so-young, to encourage the nurturing and deepening of our spirituality and connection with the Divine. God's vision is for His Church to be a community of worshippers, a people who engage regularly in looking upward as it were; and we are to be that Church that encourages this, whether in-person or virtually, to be open to hear what His Spirit is saying to us at all times, and to be in tune with God's vision for us and for our transformation in becoming the people He knows we have the potential to be through the power and presence of His Holy Spirit.

SEARCHING INWARD TO BE REGENERATED FOR GOD'S VISION

By way of being His worshipping people, we are called to acknowledge our need for God and His direction for our lives and become a transformed and loving people, a people set apart for the faithful stewardship of each other. As we heard in the Isaiah passage, through Isaiah's experience of the awesomeness of worship that was facilitated by the Seraphs and being in the presence of Almighty God, he became acutely aware of his lostness and in need of God's direction. He also became mindful that he was unclean like the community of people among whom he lived, and that his heart required cleansing and a transformation in order to be found worthy to be in the presence of God.

When we commit time to worship Almighty God weekly and connect with Him, such a time provides us with the opportunity for personal introspection, to search inwardly and discern how we stand before God, if we have been faithful to Him in our lives or if we have been a people living by worldly standards with "unclean lips." Our assembling weekly or spending time with God is to be that occasion to hear what the Spirit has to say to us concerning our individual lives and collectively as His Church, to reflect on what changes are needed to redirect our lives on the paths of righteousness and to live in community as we are called to be holy as He is holy and to love as He loves. Our gathering, for the hearing of God's word, the fellowship, the breaking of bread and the prayers, is to enable us to be God's loving and caring community of believers, to be His family, the Body of Christ, that is equipped and able to move outward as His transforming agents in our nation. Our Church is therefore to provide such an atmosphere for this level of introspection, growth, transformation and development.

For Isaiah, when he acknowledged his shortcomings, God made his transformation possible through the assistance of one of the Seraphs who provided the means whereby he was cleansed and made ready to answer God's call for agents who will go out for Him. From this vision of Isaiah, I liken the Seraphs to those of us who are the ordained ministers – the deacons, priests and bishops, and those in a licensed or specialized lay ministry within God's Church – the PCC members, Eucharistic Ministers, Ushers and Health guild, Choir and Servers, Sunday School teachers, Executive Committees of various organizations, etc. who are called to embrace, serve, transform and uplift those who may sense some lostness and need for God's direction and forgiveness in their lives. We are especially called to exercise a higher level of stewardship in welcoming, guiding, counseling and caring for the "Isaiahs" among us through our various ministries, that they will know that they belong and can be assisted in their growth, development and transformation and equipped for their own work of ministry in the building up of the body of Christ and its mission. As we the ordained and specialized lay ministers are also called at this time to search inward, the Spirit may be saying to us that we have not been as efficient and effective in this area of our stewardship and ministry in our attending to those among us who are feeling lost, as though they don't belong or fit in or are lacking something in their lives that is not being addressed. God's vision for our being His Missional Church reveals that we are to be as the Seraph was for Isaiah in ministering to their needs, feeding His lambs and tending His sheep. This means that we need to be self-aware and mindful that we are role models and care agents; and our lives and interactions with each other must reflect God's love, as a united body, as we serve and nurture His people through our various ministries, programmes and times of fellowship. This too will be considered at our Synod on Wednesday, after receiving the various reports of our commissions, ministries and organizations on Tuesday, for one of our discussion forums will invite us to hear what the Spirit is saying to our Church in terms of improving its stewardship, its mentorship, its membership, its discipleship, its organizational fellowship and its vocations for leadership; all towards the vision that every baptized member of our church is regenerated and to be encouraged to sense his or her own calling to serve, and are nurtured and equipped as Christian saints for the work of ministry, ready to move outward as God's transformed and transforming agents within our nation.

MOVING OUTWARD AS AGENTS OF GOD'S VISION FOR A MISSIONAL CHURCH

To move outward, as God's transformed and transforming agents, is essentially our calling to be God's Missional Church, God's "Sent" Church, that was given birth that day of Pentecost; and this certainly is God's vision and desire for us the Anglican Church to be in this nation. And we know this even from what is revealed in Isaiah's vision, of God's desire to have missionary agents to be sent out on His behalf, when we are told of Isaiah hearing the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?' In other words, Isaiah heard God asking who will be his willing workers, who will go out on His behalf to the people of Israel and seek to transform the lives of those with "unclean lips", those who have lost their way and do not acknowledge God in their lives, those who engage in idolatry and rebel against God and His purposes, those who disrespect the value and dignity of other lives, who live for self and ignore the plight of the vulnerable. To this quest of God, Isaiah faithfully responded, 'Here am I; send me!' That is to also be our disposition and response as members of the Anglican Church that is called to be missional in a nation that is suffering from various maladies.

Our nation may not find itself as sick or corrupt as was the nation of Israel in the time of Isaiah, but if we are honest with ourselves, it certainly isn't well. Last year we had the record high of 50 homicides and already for this year, as we are now into our sixth month, we have had 21 murders (even more than last year this same time). **We are hearing** of attacks on many of our elderly men and women, they being beaten, robbed of their possessions and dignity, and having to receive medical attention. We are recognizing that in our nation, that still boast of being predominantly Christian, it is becoming more of a pluralistic and materialistic

society with also a figure around 45% of our population who claim to be either irreligious or have no religious affiliation. **We are hearing** once again the concern about the indiscipline, disrespect, disregard and violent behaviour of some of our school children towards their teachers, causing our teachers to be afraid for their safety as some incidents of student violence against teachers have been reported. **We are hearing** about voter apathy coming out of our last by-election where there was a low voter turn-out; and even though there was a winner, there is concern that some Barbadians are getting tired of what in the past was termed politricks because for these folks their lot has not improved by much, if by any, since 2018 and moving beyond what has been dubbed the “lost decade”. **We are hearing** about eight out of ten deaths in our nation being caused by non-communicable diseases (NCDs); and to assist in reducing this number, taxes have been placed on sugary drinks and salted snacks; and we are also hearing of the concern for our mental wellness especially since 2020 and the advent of the Covid-19 pandemic.

In a nation where all is not well, our God is surely concerned about the health and wellness and safety of our people. He is not only a God concerned about our spiritual wellness, but also about social, emotional, financial and physical wellbeing; for His mission is one that is wholistic and He cares for every soul, in every nation in all of His creation. And His vision is for our Barbados to be well and He says on this Pentecost Day, “who shall I send and who will go for us?” and we as His Church are readily to respond ‘Here am I; send me!’

Just before this Charge, we sang that beautiful Hymn “I the Lord of Sea and Sky” with the chorus:

***“Here I am, Lord. Is it I, Lord? I have heard you calling in the night;
I will go, Lord, if you lead me; I will hold your people in my heart.”***

Well yes, He is calling you and He is calling me tonight, He is calling us to go, to move outward, into our communities as we hold our nation’s people in our hearts. Our Church has already, in some ways, been moving out to assist where we can. In the past we have been offering some parenting programmes in our communities through the Diocesan Mothers Union and the Family Life Commission recognizing the cry of parents who are having difficulty raising their children or who need assistance in preparing to have children and need that early guidance. But we need to do more work in promoting wholesome family life, giving guidance on how to raise God-fearing families and offer counsel and conflict resolutions to dysfunctional families; for strong, sound families are the bedrock to the health and wellness of our society and nation. Our Mothers Union and Family Life Commission will certainly hear the Spirit calling to move outwards some more in the promotion of wholesome and godly family life. Through the Advocacy, Justice and Social Responsibility, our Church began some discussions with the Special Development Unit of the Ministry of People Empowerment and Elder Affairs concerning offering some assistance to vulnerable families through its “One Family Programme” where we will seek to make available some of our parish centers for a number of their projects. This commission also continues discussion with the Ministry of Education concerning how we partner with schools and assist especially with those children who may be struggling with some learning disability. So we are being inspired to move outward into our community, and we are seeking to even assist in developing the musical talent of our youth, for to quote Senator The Rev’d Canon Dr John Rogers, if we “place a [musical] instrument in the hand of a child, there will be less opportunity for someone to put a gun.” St George Parish Church, for example, is offering music lessons for children in the community, ages 5-19, at a very nominal cost that started by being heavily subsidized by a grant from the New England Company and today by members of that parish; and we intend to have similar programmes operationalized across this nation. As a matter of fact, one will hopefully before the end of this year be developed within the north of our island by way of a grant coming from our companion Diocese of Southwark, in London.

We are moving outward, and we are even preparing persons for the Distinctive Diaconal Ministry, coordinated by The Rev’d Canon Dr Monnelle Williams, which is intended to assist even more with our

Church's engagement with the community in sharing the gospel in those fields and enabling the Church to respond more faithfully to community needs; they are especially to be our field ambassadors even though all of us are called to be ambassadors for Christ. It is anticipated that some eight or nine will be ordained for this ministry later this year. We are also moving outward at the end of this month with our Health and Wellness Extravaganza. This will signal the climax of our Bicentennial observance and all Anglicans and members of the community are invited to come out and participate. As Anglicans we will continue to demonstrate our commitment to not only being spiritually healthy but also physically healthy in body and mind as we are encouraged to care and be good stewards of our bodies as the temple of God's Holy Spirit. We know that our Lord placed considerable emphasis on restoring people to good physical and mental health and not just to be spiritually healthy, and we know this to be part of our missional call to encourage our nation, that is especially afflicted with NCDs, to take their health seriously by eating wisely and engaging in regular exercise. Our Health and Wellness Commission, beyond the Extravaganza that comes off on Saturday June 28, from 2-6 p.m. on the St George Glebe playing field, will be launching a Diocesan campaign to promote healthy lifestyles by mobilizing key resources at our disposal under the theme "Get Moving, We Not Standing Still." This initiative will not only target us as Anglicans but all Barbadians.

Besides all that I have mentioned of our moving outwards, we intend in our third forum discussion to further consider our outreach to other vulnerable groups in our society, to our prisoners and ex-offenders and their families, and to make more of our resources available to assist in our community engagement.

GOD'S VISION IS FOR OUR CHURCH TO BE LED BY THE SPIRIT TO BE MISSIONAL

Anglicans and Christians all, God's vision and our calling is to be His Missional Church, one that is filled with His Holy Spirit that prompts us to keep focus on God and to hear from Him during our times of worship, to allow Him to transform our lives as a community that loves and cares for each other, and to send us out to touch and transform the lives of others because He desires the wellness of all within our nation. May we ever strive to be who He has called us to be as we, the Anglican Church in this Diocese, seek always to be attentive to what His Spirit is saying to His Church as we keep looking upward, searching inward and moving outward in His name. May this year's Synod bear much fruit as our delegates open ourselves to hear from God at this crucial time in our Church and our nation. Amen.