



DIOCESE OF ALGOMA

From the Bishop

September 29th, 2017

Dear members of the Thunder Bay/North Shore Discernment Committee,

I want to begin this letter with an expression of gratitude for the faith-filled way in which your committee is undertaking the merger work before you. The Congregational Development Officer, the Rev. Dr. Jay Kayle, returned from his time in Thunder Bay recently and shared stories of hope as he relayed some of the discussions that had taken place. The conversations you are having are not simply a business approach to mergers, but rather are framed in the language of the Kingdom of God (here on earth) and how a rebirthed Church might proclaim Gospel values, embody them in your own context, and result in growth and vitality in the north ward of Thunder Bay. Once again I want to say how insightful I found the Together in Hope Report when it was sent to me earlier this year and to thank you for the time that went into preparing it.

I know that whenever discussions around mergers take place it can result in anxiety within congregations who wonder what this will mean for their church. I was pleased to hear that your committee issues regular Meeting Minutes Summaries so that each congregation can be kept aware of your committee's progress and given food for thought.

As the discussions in your committee move forward, I have heard that many congregants in your churches hope of a merged parish with each of the three points bringing their gifts and strengths to it - a prosperous Children's and Youth Ministry (a strength of St. Michael's), a spiritually arousing Music Ministry (a strength of St. Luke's) and a vital Street Ministry (a strength of St. John's), and that joint worship, fellowship and working together will revitalize many other ministries that are currently limited by too few volunteers .

As encouraging as these discussions and merger talks are, I do not want the work that has already begun to lose momentum in the north ward. I am convinced that maintaining the status quo is not an option. Therefore, I am looking to the Thunder Bay-North Shore Deanery Officials to present a merger proposal on your behalf to the March 2018 Executive Committee.

I ask your committee to move forward with the merger in a concrete way and offer you the following timeline for this to happen.

1. A proposal for a merger in the north ward of the city be presented to the three congregations of St. Luke's, St. Michael's and All Angels, and St. John's by the end of November 2017. The congregations would then be given some time to prayerfully consider the proposal and vote on it in a Special Vestry Meeting early in 2018.
2. In order for the material to be distributed to members of the Executive Committee in good time, we would need to receive the proposal and accompanying documentation by the middle of January 2018.

As the rebirthed Church will gather in one building only, please explore the options for all three buildings so that when the time comes to make a decision on a facility to house the new church, the best possible determination can be made with the necessary information at hand. This may be a stumbling block for some members of the congregations who remain tied to their building, and others might use stalling tactics to delay the process. In these situations it is usually best to 'push through' anyway. I hope that with your committee's guidance, and support from the Deanery Officials and Diocesan staff, the majority of parishioners in each of your congregations will catch the exciting vision for a viable and vibrant Anglican presence in this area of Thunder Bay for years to come.

As you know there have been merger talks in other deaneries. From these conversations we have gleaned many insights: that clergy support and encouragement are key to the success of the merger; that good news stories of congregations worshipping and working together need to be shared; that merger talks bring with them a range of emotions from sadness to anger to excitement, and from despair to renewed hope; that team ministry brings fresh ideas and new opportunities never dreamed of before; and that while history and legacy are important, vision for the new future to which God is calling us is crucial.

Your committee and your congregations have been in my daily prayers, and this will continue in the coming months. It was incredibly heartwarming for me to read your opening prayers and to know that I am being upheld by you. Thank you.

I am conscious that you will be receiving this letter on September 29th, the Feast of St. Michael's and All Angels. The Old Testament reading appointed for the day is from Genesis 28 and is that marvelous passage describing Jacob resting his head on a stone and dreaming of a ladder between heaven and earth with angels descending and ascending the ladder. When Jacob awakens he marvels that God was with him and he did not realize it. My prayer for all three congregations and your committee is that you will continue to have a strong sense of God's presence with you as you journey on.

Yours, in Christ's service,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Anne Germond". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a small cross-like mark at the beginning.

The Rt. Rev. Anne Germond
Bishop of Algoma

cc. The Ven. Deborah Kraft
The Rev. Diane Hilpert-McIlroy
Kathleen Aitken
Dale Sparkes