

## Canon Susan Bell elected to serve as 12th Bishop of Niagara



**A service of consecration is tentatively planned for Saturday, May 5, 2018 at Christ's Church Cathedral in Hamilton.** After a brief transition period, Bell is expected to assume responsibilities as the diocesan bishop of Niagara on June 1, 2018.

### **Ordination dates:**

Deacon - 1997, Diocese of Toronto

Priest - 1999, Diocese of Toronto

**Age: 51**

### **Academic Background and Professional Qualifications**

- Ph.D. candidate, Church History, St. Michael's College, Toronto School of Theology (pending)  
*The thesis is an exploration of George Herbert's Country Parson within its ecclesiastical and political context.*  
*Specialization: 17th century English Church History/George Herbert/Reformed Spirituality.*
- Master of Divinity, 1998, Wycliffe College, University of Toronto
- Bachelor of Arts, English, 1994, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario

- Ontario Secondary School Diploma, 1984, Glendale Secondary School, Hamilton, Ontario

### **Parish Placements and Ministry History**

- Canon Missioner, The Diocese of Toronto, August 2013 – present.
- Honorary Canon, St. James Cathedral, January 2014
- Honorary Assistant, St. James Cathedral, September 2014 – present
- Chaplain, Havergal College, August 2007 – 2017.
- Associate Priest, St. Martin in the Fields Anglican Church, November 1999 – present
- Summer Incumbent, St. George's, Métis-Sur-Mer, Québec, 2015 – present,
- Assistant Curate, St. Martin in the Fields Anglican Church, December 1997 – October 1999
- Chaplain, Wycliffe College 1997

### **Other Areas of Interest**

In addition to academic work, another area of interest is in vocal performance. After studying for two years in England - in London and then Oxford, on my return I was a professional member of the parish choir at St. John's Elora for 2 and a half years from 1992-94 before proceeding to theological college in Toronto. More recently I have acted as a retreat leader and conference speaker at the following events:

- Université Sorbonne Nouvelle, Paris, Session Moderator, Herbert in Paris Conference, 2017

- The Convent of the Sisterhood of St. John the Divine, Quiet Day: Poetry as Spiritual Direction, 2016
- St. Bride's, Clarkson, Parish Retreat, June 2015
- Keynote Speaker: Society of Catholic Priests, North American Chapter Meeting – Trinity College, University of Toronto, 2014
- Wycliffe College: Student and Staff Retreat, 2014
- St. Martin in the Fields: Poetry and Faith, 2014
- St. John's, Elora: George Herbert in Advent, 2013
- International George Herbert Festival – Salisbury, Wiltshire, 2013

## Publications

*“Christian Foundations”* – A nine part Christian Basics resource. Co-authored with The Rev'd Canon Judy and Pat Paulsen: <https://www.wycliffecollege.ca/wycliffe-serves/christian-foundations>

*“Invited”* A six-part written resource for parishes exploring genuine Christian invitation. Co-authored with The Rev'd Canon Judy Paulsen, January 2015: [http://spiritofinvitation.com/media/invited\\_book\\_online\\_full.pdf](http://spiritofinvitation.com/media/invited_book_online_full.pdf)

*“Sermons Are Dangerous Things: George Herbert, Richard Bernard and the Politics of Preaching.”* Published in the *Toronto Journal of Theology*, Calvin at 500 A Special Supplement of the Toronto Journal of Theology, Supplement 1, 41-54.

2010: [http://www.utpjournals.press/doi/abs/10.3138/tjt.26.suppl\\_1.41](http://www.utpjournals.press/doi/abs/10.3138/tjt.26.suppl_1.41)

### **Question #1 - What core principle(s) (max 3) guide your ministry and leadership style?**

I have one strong core principle of leadership: to listen and watch for where God is at work in the church and the world and to join in. All other elements of my leadership style flow from this core principle. As a spiritual discipline, I try to constantly listen – in prayer, through scripture, in the church and through culture - to discern God's will in order to formulate direction and delineate a compelling vision. I enjoy casting that vision with imagination and energy. But leadership is more than vision, it's working a plan with a critical path and achievable deliverables, so I'm also a strategic leader. I

really enjoy bringing people and resources together to work toward a common goal. I have a genuine investment in all people as bearing the image of Christ and my relational and bridge-building skills are a keynote of my style. I am a natural team builder; I work with the people God has given me to use their skillsets in order to align vision and action.

**Question #2 - What do you think are the three most significant challenges facing the Diocese of Niagara over the next 5 years, and what is your vision for how we might respond?**

It's been said that the future belongs to those who can cope with complexity. We live in a culture of discontinuous change and its relationship with the church is also changing quickly. In this next season, we are called to be realistic about our challenges – but also about our opportunities – and that will call for strategic planning based on evidence and experience in ministry. I have been part of strategic planning processes both at Havergal College and at the Diocese of Toronto and have seen how effective their implementation can be for aligning purpose and resources with identified priorities in order to achieve the best outcomes. In his charge to Synod in 2015, Bishop Michael invited the church to “take a compass reading,” and examine the priorities for the near future. I believe these include the following:

- To intentionally invest in Christian Nurture and Catechesis for spiritual renewal, confidence and energy for mission and its outworking: social justice.
- To form, based on evidence, a sustainable and strategic plan for resourcing growth in parishes.
- To leverage the diocese's many property assets to position ourselves for future growth and when opportunities are identified, to plan for church plants and/or amalgamations.

**Question #3 - Identify 2 significant leadership roles you have played in your diocese. In each case, what was your role, what did you learn, and what was the outcome?**

**Canon Missioner, Diocese of Toronto 2013 – present** In this role, I act as a catalyst and enabler of missional ministry in the Diocese of Toronto. I am a vision advocate, coach and mentor for existing church plants and pioneers and for short and medium term missions. I plan strategically for new churches and support extra-parochial ministries such as Chaplains. In addition, I fulfill a number of roles as Missioner throughout the Diocesan structure. These experiences have demonstrated to me the pressing need for Christians to understand, engage and respond to our secular culture from preparation for ministry to shaping ecclesial structures for mission, and in praxis through parish and extra-parochial ministries.

**Senior Chaplain, Havergal College 2007-2017** My role was to engage with students, staff, faculty and alumnae in the school community through prayer, pastoral care and sacrament; to provide contextual discipleship programming; to create and implement the vision of a Chaplaincy department; to oversee and encourage theological students and Assistant Curates ministering in the school context. My experiences over those ten years were very valuable. I learned how to minister within a culture that is inoculated against faith and yet which expresses a deep spiritual longing; I learned to listen deeply and to respond as the Holy Spirit prompted in ways that made sense in that community and this resulted in the growth of the Chaplaincy Department and budget; in the renewal of the Religious Education curriculum and in strengthening the practice of daily Prayer throughout the school.

**Question #4 - Identify a role you have played or a significant way you have been involved in the national Church and/or the worldwide Anglican Communion. What did you learn from this experience?**

My National Responsibilities include: acting as Anglican representative for the National Ecumenical Dialogue between the Anglican Church of Canada

and the United Church of Canada. I co-led the Inter-Diocesan Learning Community for Mission in the Diocese of Toronto which included 5 other Canadian Dioceses and I was a member of General Synod in 2016. I am a member of the Board of Threshold Ministries and the current National Team Leader for Fresh Expressions Canada.

Internationally, I represented the Diocese of Toronto throughout the Inter-Diocesan Learning community process in Liverpool, England from 2013-2016. This past September, for the second time, I was part of the International Fresh Expressions Learning Community in the UK.

I have learned that we share commonalities in the challenges of secularism and in the opportunities for reconnecting with our culture across Canada and with the international Body of Christ – and that national and international ministry partnerships are valuable learning tools for our future.

### **What do you anticipate will be your most significant area for growth as the spiritual and organizational leader of our diocese?**

**Susan Bell:** I foresee that the most important area of growth will be in keeping my priorities and relationships in focus: with God; with my primary communities – my family and my closest co-workers; and with the wider community of the diocese.

As this is a time of transition and therefore some anxiety in the life of the diocese, I will need to keep close company with Jesus as I intentionally listen for God's leading in the days and years ahead. I also know that I will want to find places to be led for spiritual refreshment - and I think I will have to be more disciplined about times of Sabbath.

In terms of an organizational growth edge, I expect to be diligent in familiarizing myself with the structures and culture of Niagara diocese; in immersing myself in its systems and in maintaining a judicious balance between people and policy.

And lastly, I would want to be accountable in all of these things – accountable to God and accountable to you. I would covet your prayers as I learned to live into a new vocation and would want to ask that you encouraged me in my ministry as I encouraged you in yours

### **What is your view with regards to equal marriage and will you, as Niagara’s bishop, continue to authorize the current permissive pastoral practice in the lead up to General Synod 2019?**

**Susan Bell:** My opinion remains unchanged from what I said on the floor of General Synod 2016: that I would be voting in favour of a change in the marriage canon. I have taken a long journey which has included much study, prayer, many conversations and a deep investment in relationships until I arrived at a place of peace on this issue.

I would preserve the status quo in the lead up to General Synod 2019 and would be proud to cast my vote in favour of equal marriage in the Anglican Church of Canada.

### **What are your views about the role of Bishop as teacher?**

**Susan Bell:** In the ordinal for the consecration of a bishop, the Metropolitan prays that God would make them “wise as a teacher, and steadfast as a guardian of its faith and sacraments.” From the earliest descriptions of the office in 1 Timothy, it’s clear that the bishop must be an “apt teacher” preserving unity and continuity with apostolic teaching. Equipping leaders to hand on the faith, acting as guardian of the Church's unity, and being able to lead in confessing that faith were essential skills of the bishop. In addition, the episcopal ministry of oversight is itself indirect teaching.

It’s a joy to me that this is in the list of charisms for the office of bishop. I have naturally developed my vocation as a teacher of the faith – and have thoroughly enjoyed it. I have spent the last ten years in an Anglican school teaching the faith through apologetics. However, in order to effectively teach, it is important to first be a learner. This is one of the reasons I pursued a PhD in Anglican church history and I am delighted to be invited

to be a retreat leader and keynote speaker, as well as engaging in conventional teaching.

A prayerful episcopal teaching ministry is a very practical way through which the church receives the energy and direction for mission as we have seen by the example of bishops in the Anglican Church of Canada and around the Communion who act for justice in the name of Christ.

**What do you consider to be important next steps in Niagara's commitment to truth and reconciliation with Indigenous peoples living within the diocese and the northern part of Turtle Island known as Canada?**

**Susan Bell:** In 1986, I was present as the General Council of the United Church of Canada made its formal apology to the Indigenous Peoples of Canada. I watched as the Moderator met with the gathered elders of tribes from across Canada. It seemed to me that the sorrow of the ages was poured out that night by men and women whose language, culture and families had been deeply damaged by ideas which had failed a people and society. The apology was not accepted, but received. That signaled to me that something else significant had happened: that in receiving the apology our Aboriginal sisters and brothers had also established that they would accept it (or not) on their own terms and in their own time. A new and right spirit had arisen because of this action.

That experience laid down in me a bond of respect for our Indigenous Peoples. In the years since, I have realized that it is not for us to suggest steps for our Indigenous Peoples to follow but to listen respectfully for what they suggest. It is for us hear the truth of the experiences, personal stories, and learn the larger historical context. It is for us to pray for peace and justice and to continue to acknowledge our part in our fractured history as we live and work on the side of reconciliation and justice.

And, in time, following their leading, it is for us to respond to their directions for next steps.

## **What are the most important features of a parish's relationship with its community, now and in the future?**

**Susan Bell:** Today our parishes are faithful places of worship, of Christian nurture and education. They are places of refuge and where good works are done. But you have to walk through the doors to know and access these things. In a post-Christian society where the church is now a strange space for many if not most in our society, the courage it takes to do so is often a barrier so high, few traverse it.

I believe we need a fulsome recovery of the idea that we as Anglicans have responsibility for the cure of souls in the geographical parish around the physical church. It is after all, our tradition and our formation. In all the latest missional literature blessing the neighbourhood is proclaimed as a “new” idea. And yet this structure is foundational for Anglicans. However, it is not the relationship many of our parishes in fact, have with our neighbourhoods.

So in the future, the hope is we will be good neighbours who do good works out of the overflow of our faith in Jesus Christ; that we'll seek out ways to build bridges with those who do not yet know the name of Jesus through radical hospitality and Christian nurture that begins with where our neighbours are. This presupposes that we will intentionally get to know who the people in our geographical parish are and that we'll seek to change and grow with them as we develop an even greater fidelity to the places we are planted.

## **How do you understand the ministry role of children, youth, young adults and families in the life of the church, and what is the Bishop's role in fostering greater engagement with them?**

**Susan Bell:** The Body of Christ is one of the only truly inter-generational institutions in our society. After years of intentionally working with youth who are spiritually curious and alive, I am convinced that children/youth

and family ministry is a priority. We grow and nurture our church every bit as much as we evangelize for it.

My husband and I have raised our own four children immersed in the life of the church. They have been formed by intergenerational fellowship, as choir members, servers, readers, attending – then teaching - church school. They have formed close bonds across age, and other supposed barriers. All this comes from the bond of faith. These relationships are a precious gift in a transitory world that struggles with true relationship.

Omitting the spiritual formation of families is a very great mistake. Already in places where this has happened we are experiencing the loss of a generation. We have seen a trend where children are accompanied by grandparents. While this is a wonderful example of apostolic witness, it's sad because the transmission of faith has skipped a generation.

The Bishop's role, more than ever now, is to create and maintain space in the councils of the church to listen to the voices of young people and families as they seek to live out their baptismal ministries and share their experience of Christ among us. It's also the Bishop's role to make their formation a top priority in budgets, in programming, and to proclaim their importance as our future.