

**Report of the Synodical Bishop
to the Metro D.C. Synod Assembly
June 18, 2016**

“Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city.”

Revelation 22: 1-2

Dear friends,

The book of Revelation is one that many Christians find it easy to ignore. The imagery of the book is dreamlike and disconcerting. The visions which the book reports are sometimes violent and they are often difficult to understand. Passages of Revelation have been used throughout the history of the Church to justify all sorts of odd, even dangerous, thoughts and practices. Martin Luther famously thought that this book of the scripture could be dispensed with. Lots of other people have always agreed.

But the book of Revelation is making witness to Jesus. At a time when the fate of the Church of Jesus seemed to hang in the balance, an otherwise unknown disciple named John sent to the Christians of southern Turkey news of what he had seen. And what he had seen was the triumph of Jesus. In an eternally timeless, dreamlike way, the past and the present and the future were all acknowledged as the scene of the victory of the One who is killed and who lives, the Lamb who is Lord.

John called the Christians he served to see that it was the praise of their Lord that made their lives meaningful. All other human activities are judged to be failed or failing. Serving the Lord, and bearing for a little while the burdens of this service, this is what matters. And this is still, these centuries later, what matters for us. We live in a world that seems much more prosaic than the world of Revelation. Our visions are not usually as dramatic as John’s were. And we praise God that we do not live under the kind of persecution John’s friends endured (though we know there are Christians in our world today for whom real persecution is a daily reality.)

Yet we also want to make witness to Jesus. As we gather in our Synod Assembly, we will be considering the business and the ministries we share with one another. We will receive reports and make decisions, aided by our sense of traditional practice and by *Robert’s Rules of Order, Newly Revised (Ed. of 2011)*. But concern for our witness will be what drives us.

It was to help focus our witness that the Synod Council last April adopted a mission statement for the synod. I hope that you will read this statement, for which I prepared the first draft and which then many people helped revise. The mission statement commits us to making disciples as our first order of business and says that to do this we will nurture communities of faith, new ones coming to be and older ones renewing, where “disciples gather who share the love of

Jesus through their speech and actions.” To do this we will need leaders and financial resources, and our mission statement address these needs, too.

And our mission statement says that we commit ourselves to addressing “issues of race, poverty, injustice and personal brokenness ... in ways that shape our common life and model courage and hope for our world.” We claim that we want to be people who say and show that it is not God’s will for so many people to live in want and fear and sadness. It is not God’s will that people should live divided from one another by color and language and country of origin; there is one Lord whose coming to be human hallows all human life. Decent people disagree on how to work for peace and healing and racial justice in the world. But some kind of work like this is the common business to which we commit ourselves as individuals, and it is part of the work our synod intends to pursue.

It has always been powerful for me, a city boy really, to recognize that the final vision of Revelation is for the renewal of the human community in the form of a great and beautiful city. I love to visit in the country and I know there are people for whom the great good place will always be a farm or a small town. But I’m not like that, and neither apparently was John. He sees at the end a peaceful, lush, city with perfect tree-lined streets and where the light is eternal because it flows directly from the eternal God.

I pray that we will be witnesses for THAT city in the midst of this everyday city all of us live in and around.

“... to serve as a paradigm
now of what a plausible Future might be
is what we’re here for,”

said W. H. Auden, the great Christian poet of the last century. I am more grateful than I could ever say for all the ways that I see members of our synod serving every day as paradigms of God’s future. I hope I am one of those, too. And I am very proud to be our bishop.

In Jesus,

The Rev. Richard H. Graham
Bishop