

Q. What is the role of the bishop in the Anglican tradition?

The Anglican tradition has always straddled the line between Tradition and Reform. We honour and uphold the wisdom and the practice that has been passed along to us through the community of faith, sharing it in a way that it becomes truly alive to us Here and Now. At the same time, as part of the 'reformed' tradition, we believe that God's Spirit is still on the move, that we are not a finished product, and that there remains much for us to learn about who God is and what God's kingdom is meant to look like.

The role of bishop has been established from the early church records as an *apostolic* ministry – that is to say, that the bishop has been understood as the one responsible for passing on the tradition that has been passed on to us, maintaining the unbroken line of teaching, fellowship and practice that binds us to the apostles, the first followers of Jesus selected to continue his teaching and ministry. This responsibility has a number of facets to it: -**Teaching** – the primary role of bishop in the ancient church was that of teacher -- understanding, articulating, and sharing with the church *who God is*, and *who God wants us to be*, as revealed to us in Jesus.

-**Discernment** – the bishop leads the church in re-interpreting, in each historical and social context, how the Gospel is received, where God is leading us in new directions, as well as where God is leading us to return to what we have forgotten or neglected.

-**Unity** – through our baptism, we are united with all Christians in the Body of Christ. The Body of Christ, unfortunately, is incredibly fragmented by denominational divide, and even by arguments within our denominations. The bishops have the difficult task of maintaining a sense of unity (across our vast diversity!) within our Anglican denomination, and seeking unity and common ground between our own denominations and others (it was this work of unity which has led to the full communion agreement between the Anglican and Lutheran churches in Canada).

-**Pastor to the Pastors** – God forms us into the community of the church so that we can be strengthened as disciples – the life of Jesus in our world. The ministry of the pastor is to empower the baptized as disciples. The ministry of the bishop is to empower the pastors.

Along with this already impossibly-full job description, the ministry of the bishop ends up taking on a large variety of administrative tasks that become essential in the life of an institution as large as the church: Human Resources, Hiring, Firing, moving clergy from one church to another, helping congregations dealing with transition or conflict, fundraising, providing vision and an overall picture of congregational health and leading discernment across the spectrum of the church.

We are pleased to welcome our Bishop, Michael Bird, to St. George's this weekend. Bishop Michael was elected as Bishop of Niagara in 2007. Prior to that, he served in congregations in Burlington, Oakville, and Newfoundland. He began his ordained ministry here at St. George's, serving as Assistant Curate with Reverend Barry Hollowell from 1987-89. Welcome Bishop Michael!