

## It's A New Day!

**PHOTO CREDIT:** (Photos by Graham Lavers)

### **PHOTO OUTLINE:**

Canon Phil Potter says, “God, by his very nature, is a God of movement. He never stands still but delights in doing new things in people’s lives. He is the God of the new song, the new heart, the new name, the new covenant, the new creation, and the new heaven and earth.”

### **BREAK-OUT BOX:**

See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland. – Isaiah 43:19

### **‘H-words on the Path to Renewal’**

By Rev. Lisa G. Vaughn

Hope for the church begins in the heart, says Phil Potter, the Archbishops’ Canon Missioner in the Church of England. “Changing the culture is more important than strategy and vision,” he said.

‘A new heart for mission’ was one of four inspiring keynote talks at this fall’s Vital Church Maritimes conference, held in Truro. The author and Fresh Expressions Team Leader outlined how congregational leaders can shape missional change in a parish with genuine soul-searching. Canon Phil used six different words that begin with the letter ‘h’, based on lessons from the prophet Isaiah, to describe what’s required.

**A new honesty** – “Any change process must begin with a brutal honesty about where we really are at the moment,” Canon Phil says. Exacting questions about every aspect of a church’s activity, including ministry, worship, meetings, budgets, buildings, etc., need to be sifted regularly and rigorously by the leadership.

**A new humility** – When Christians come to see the magnificent, powerful, merciful Creator, we also recognize our weaknesses that prevent our growth. An open heart to God reveals any false motives or unwillingness to move forward. Standing in the light of the Holy One we examine our pride and our ability to relinquish powerful roles in the church. We also learn to approach God with open, trusting hands - willing to let go of our need for security and self-preservation.

**A new hunger** – Honesty and humility lead to a yearning for a glimpse of God’s future for us. “When a church is hungry enough to taste what God has on offer for them, they begin to be fed and then filled with further blessings,” writes Canon Phil in his book, ‘Pioneering a New Future.’ In truly seeking God, we are to enlarge and stretch (Isaiah 54), and not get too comfortable.

**A new kind of hurt** – Any change is going to require some pain. Jesus teaches us that like the grain of wheat, we too need to die in order to live (John 12:24-26). “Are we willing to allow some of our convictions about doing church to die,... so that we and the world we serve can truly live?” asks Canon Phil. A congregation’s offerings ought to lead to life and growth. “Where there is no sacrifice in the church, the church itself will die,” he says. “Any church that wants to stay alive must learn, in the end, to honour God with its sacrifices.” Parishes that cross this pain threshold, freeing themselves to release all that they have to God, position themselves to develop and move forward in mission.

**A new harmony** – The value of relationships within the congregation rises to a higher level of authenticity and priority. Canon Phil says, “A changing church will increasingly need to know how to love one another, accept one another, encourage one another, bear with one another and, most likely, forgive one another.”

**A new hope** – Our scriptures and past experience of Divine faithfulness call us to put our total trust in the God of hope. “The higher you and I rise in our worship and the closer we draw to God, the more different our lives and our churches are going to look, and the more we will see what God wants us to see,” says the former parish priest. This is how we will engage in ministry, seeing all the ways God can move, open doors and provide for future mission.

**BREAK-OUT BOX:**

Those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint. – Isaiah 40:31

All four of Canon Phil Potter’s talks invoked VCM 2017’s theme, ‘Streams of Hope.’ He said that churches are “fueled by the power of hope,” first with dreams, then moving to visions and then goals. Ultimately it requires us to engage in a paradigm shift, including being passion-focused, not problem-focused. “Where is the Holy Spirit calling us to see the doors that are open?,” he asked. “How we can develop an eye for opportunities?”

*(The Rev’d. Lisa G. Vaughn is the Diocesan Parish Vitality Coordinator. For articles, inspiration and insights on congregational vitality and mission see the Facebook page “Parish Vitality Coordinator – Diocese of NS & PEI. and Anglican Net News, “Six-Minute Study”.)*