

**THE DIOCESE OF THE BAHAMAS AND THE TURKS AND CAICOS
ISLANDS**



**THE BISHOP'S CHARGE TO THE ONE-HUNDRED AND TWENTY-SECOND
SESSION
OF SYNOD
AT THE SYNOD OPENING EUCHARIST IN CHRIST CHURCH
CATHEDRAL, NASSAU
ON MONDAY, 20TH OCTOBER 2025 AT 7:30 P.M.**

PART I

As we Gather

My sisters and brothers, good evening. Please remain standing.

As we gather this evening, we thank God for the life and contribution of Archbishop Drexel Wellington Gomez, who died on Tuesday, 14th October on his 64th Wedding Anniversary. He was 88 years old and had served the Church in the Bahamas and the Turks and Caicos Islands as a priest, diocesan administrator, bishop and archbishop, a lecturer, scholar, and academian. He knew human frailty, he knew compassion, and he knew redemption by grace. He served in the community, in government affairs and in the Province of The West Indies and the Worldwide Anglican Communion. He was a husband, father, grandfather, and great grandfather. We offer condolences to his wife of 64 years, Carroll, his children Damien, Dennis, Dominic and Deborah and their families, his siblings Andy, Anita, and Veronica and their families, the Family of St. Agnes Church and to all who mourn.

We observe a moment of silence in his memory.

(pause)

Rest eternal, grant unto him, O Lord. And let light perpetual shine upon him.
May he rest in peace. Amen.

May his soul, and the souls of the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace. Amen.

Please be seated.

Opening

We gather this evening to convene the 122nd Session of the Synod of the Anglican Diocese of The Bahamas and The Turks and Caicos Islands. I welcome you all into Christ Church Cathedral.

Welcome

We welcome:

- Her Excellency The Most Hon. Dame Cynthia Pratt, Governor General of the Commonwealth of the Bahamas.
- The Hon. Philip Davis, Prime Minister of the Commonwealth of the Bahamas.
- The Hon. Fred Mitchell, Minister of Foreign Affairs
- Senator the Honourable Darren Henfield, representing The Honourable Michael Pintard, Leader of the Opposition.
- The Hon. LaShell Adderley, President of the Senate
- The Most Hon. Dame Marguerite Pindling, Former Governor General
- Dr. Delton Fernander, the President of The Bahamas Christian Council
- Bishop Claire Robinson, President of The Bahamas Turks and Caicos Islands Conference (MCCA) and Mr. Irvin Robinson.
- Bishop Dr. Woodley Thompson, National Overseer of The Church of God of Prophecy in the Bahamas, and Mrs. Thompson.
- The Rev. Pascale Saunders, representing Bishop Joseph Smith, Administrative Bishop of The Church of God in The Bahamas.
- Bishop Denczil Rolle, General Superintendent, Highway Church of God in The Bahamas, and Mrs. Rolle.
- Chancellor, Justice Bernard Turner, Vice Chancellor, Madame Justice Diane Stewart, and the Registrar, Mrs. Tonya Bastian-Galanis.
- Archdeacon Mark Fox, Interim Diocesan Administrator
- Ms. Vanessa Taylor, Interim Financial Comptroller.
- The members of all Diocesan Committees.

- The Director of Education, Mr. Alphonso Major and Mrs. Tamara Major, the Deputy Director, Mrs. Lelani Burrows, Principals, Administrators, and students of our four schools: St. Andrew's School, Exuma, The Bishop Michael Elson School, Grand Bahama, St. Anne's School, and St. John's College in New Providence.
- Clergy and Lay Delegates to the 122nd Session of Synod.
- The Spouses of the Clergy
- Miss Linda Farrington, who leads the Synod preparation process, assisted by Miss Leonette Roxborough, Miss Tamara Pedican, and all those others who have helped us to be where we are this week.
- The staff of the Diocesan Office.
- We welcome the Catechists, Lay Readers, Servers from various parishes, and all persons present.
- We welcome those sharing in this service via live streaming on Facebook and YouTube, on ZNS television, and on the ZNS Radio Network in The Bahamas, The Turks and Caicos Islands, the Caribbean, South Florida, and all over the world. Thank you for sharing with us.
- We are grateful to the Very Rev. Harry Bain, Dean of Nassau, Deacon Preston Pinder and the Staff of the Cathedral, Mr. Adrian Archer (Director of Music), Dr. Sparkman Ferguson, Organist, the St. Barnabas Senior Choir under the direction of Venus Bonimy, Weston Mortimer accompanying, Mr. Cameron Wallace and the Acolytes, Mr. Christopher Smith and the Ushers, The Diocesan Media Team, and all of the ministries that have come together to make this service possible.
- And finally, we thank Fr. DeAngelo Bowe, Fr. Rondeno Rolle and the family of Holy Trinity Parish for providing the Synod Conference Site.

Our Identity and Purpose

As we gather, we proclaim and celebrate that we are the Church, the Body of Christ, gathered in God's name to do God's work. Yes, no matter what is going on, what is going right or going wrong, we have an identity and a mandate to be God's Church. As a church, we have our challenges, like any entity, and this is not a complaint or a lament but a statement of fact of the human experience - but this is a great diocese, a wonderful landscape for ministry and we must thank God for what we have. Those who visit the Bahamas and the Turks and Caicos Islands marvel and wonder at our vibrancy, enthusiasm, diversity, our clergy, our vocations, and our ministries. We have ALOT and let us thank HIM... ALOT.

In our thanksgiving, we must recognize that there is always room for improvement: there are shortcomings, deficiencies, and inefficiencies to address and work on - so we cannot become complacent or fall asleep.

Declaration of Opening

Thus, we have worked hard this past year in all our various parishes, ministries and departments, and now we convene the Synod, which I now declare open in the name of the Father and on the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Health Care in the Bahamas

The Bahamas has many fine healthcare institutions, public and private, and some top-notch persons working there, from janitors to executives and medical personnel - and let that never be forgotten.

But the public healthcare system still leaves much to be desired. Persons still wait too long for services and procedures, some for two years or more. Conditions and service in some areas of the Princess Margaret Hospital (PMH) and some clinics are deplorable. And the attitude and behavior of many staff is deplorable.

Let me be quick to add that this attitude and behavior is not limited to PMH or the government clinics. It is symptomatic of a wider decline in popular culture, attitude and behavior.

Now, if you work at PMH or a government clinic and this does not describe you, then great. What is for you, you take; what is not for you, leave it right there, and carry on with your excellence. But there is something wrong with our government health care system. Governments have tried and some administrators and staff work hard.

And make no mistake: this is not all the government's fault. Government can provide all the investment and facilities. The attitude, professionalism, and work ethic of the staff still needs to be in place.

I wish to commend successive governments for establishing, rolling out and operating the National Health Insurance Programme. It is much needed and much appreciated. However, there is an urgent need to go further. Too many Bahamians are suffering and dying because they have no health insurance, or because they need more than just primary care. It is heartbreaking! For people who have worked, paid taxes, contributed to the society it is not right for them to suffer and die if the facilities are here, the expertise are here, the ailment is evident, and their only disqualification is they do not have the money.

I beg the government to push this forward not for its vote-gathering capacity, but as a national development priority

Health Care and Social Services in the Turks and Caicos Islands

In the Turks and Caicos Islands, I sympathize that the quality of, access to and cost of healthcare are all ongoing concerns. Related is the fact that social support for the vulnerable (the elderly, migrants, poor) is under stress due to rising costs.

There is strain on the national budget as governments are spending more and more to send residents overseas for treatment not available in country. In 2024, \$23 million was spent on overseas referrals.

There is strain on local hospitals and clinics as more people rely on the limited beds and medical resources (doctors, equipment and supplies), despite the significant investment in health services that has been made.

There are two risks that concern me:

- (a) the worsening condition of marginalized groups who cannot afford healthcare or are not eligible for social services; and
- (b) the possibility of inadequate care during a public health emergency or a national disaster.

Of even greater alarm is the reality of increasing social inequality between the “haves” (who can afford and access healthcare) and the “have nots” who cannot.

I beg the government, the private sector and the society to have a mind and a heart for these realities before things explode. It is not just the government’s job: private sector, you need to get up off some of that money. And general population, you need to deal with some of your bad attitudes and prejudices toward foreigners and poor people.

General Elections in Both Countries

The Progressive National Party (PNP) won the General Elections that were held on 7th February in the Turks and Caicos Islands. Congratulations. The PNP secured 16 out of 19 seats; while the People’s Democratic Movement (PDM) won two; and an independent candidate won the South Caicos seat. The PNP’s success was particularly notable in the At-Large seats, where all 9 PNP candidates emerged victorious.

Ladies and Gentlemen of Parliament, this is a call to humility and service to the Turks and Caicos YOU claim to love. Keep that in mind and aim high. Let your time in office be an opportunity to show the best of who you are, never mind who is showing their worse side.

And my Commonwealth of the Bahamas is approaching both a bye election and general elections. That means many things to many people but, above all, it is also a call to serve and to build the country WE claim to love. To all involved: aim high and show the best of who you are, never mind who is showing their worse side.

And let me say something to both sitting governments that I have said before: we need greater and more transparent campaign finance reform. That’s right: I said it!!

It is wrong for money to control the outcome of an election or the future of a country. I do not care how much it happens and how widespread it is, or how much it greases however many people.

Some will say, “aw, bishop, get real. You can’t change that. Money will win elections, and the controllers will control.” To which I say, “Yes, for now – but it is wrong!”

And let me say something else: the Hebrews' bondage in Egypt seemed final; the transatlantic slave trade and negro slavery in the Americas and The Caribbean seemed incorrigible, and the fact that women could not vote in general elections in the Bahamas and in many other countries seemed set in stone.

Persons spoke out even though the odds were insurmountable...and change came! Therefore, I am saying that we must have election campaign finance reform - although no government wants to touch it. We have to move the election process closer to a national issues / national development / character and integrity-based landscape.

It needs to be done!

I beg you all, in The Turks and Caicos Islands and in The Bahamas, "who has ears to hear, please hear."

And one more thing, as we raise accountability and operating standards we have to respect the Public Disclosure process in the Bahamas. If you want to serve, declare your assets in respect of the existing legislation. We cannot have parliamentarians and senior civil servants ignoring the Law.

Maturity in our National Conversation

This leads me to one of the two most important points I will make tonight: The need for maturity in our national conversations.

The average Bahamian and Turks and Caicos Islander today is far more educated and/or exposed than the citizens of decades past. They are more aware of current events and proper procedures. Leadership means creating an environment where, and moving the country in a direction where, we can properly discuss, dissect, analyze, and understand complex real issues amid disagreements, tension and contention. We should not be encouraging discussion on personalities or engaging in character assassination.

As leaders, we must acknowledge our own humanity and lack of perfection. It is acceptable to make a mistake or to deal with a matter incorrectly, but we have to acknowledge the same and apologize and seek to do better. We cannot simply shift the narrative and make more noise to deflect from our fault. It is not acceptable to cast blame, avoid responsibility or attempt to smooth over difficult or harmful decisions.

And, even as we take responsibility for our actions, let us keep the level of dialogue high, real, issue-based and national-development driven. This applies to leaders in every sphere of our two societies.

And as we talk about leaders in all spheres, subordinates, those being led, must respect honesty and accountability, help to keep the focus on issues and national development and not on superficial things, tit-for-tat, one-upmanship, the appearance of success or victory - and on what you can get for yourself and your children at the expense of the greater good.

All of us must contribute to maturer conversation.

Empathy and Leadership

Secondly, the discussion about the two general elections leads me to the second of my two most important points: the need for leaders to be empathetic. Let us understand the huge impact, positive and negative, of our displayed priorities, our examples and our decisions on the lives of people. I encourage leaders to seek to do the most good for the most people. Such a path may be unpopular or may make some people uncomfortable, but the greater good - and focusing on the most vulnerable - should be the priority. We should not become lost in excessive pride, the pursuit of fame or basking in attention. And let us not shy away from admitting mistakes.

Why is this so important? Because of the future. Just because we cannot see future generations does not mean that they will not exist and be the citizens of our two countries. Those future generations are the greater good. Think about them as we live and wield power and influence today.

Immigration - Bahamas

As we focus on the reality of immigrants of various statuses in the Bahamas, let us keep in mind that they are people, human beings in diverse circumstances of life. Illegal or not, they are human beings. So processes such as deportation, while necessary, must be conducted humanely.

Shanty towns break the law and create unsafety, and we cannot allow them to continue unaddressed. I want us to note something: for every shantytown or off-grid situation that exists, many heads of households maintain that they are paying rent to someone to be there, usually to a Bahamian. Shame on us!!

We have to acknowledge the lapses in our systems that have allowed immigrant rights - human rights - to not be upheld. We need to formalize, promote and maintain a pathway to regularization of persons who have been born here to non-Bahamian parents, so many of whom know no other country and have contributed, and are contributing, to the development of this country.

Immigration - Turks and Caicos Islands (TCI)

There has been an increase in illegal immigration, especially from Haiti, which has been identified as a contributor - one of several contributing factors - to gangs, drugs, guns and human trafficking. Now you TCI people do not lay all the blame on foreigners, because some of you are the problem. You contribute to some of the territory's issues.

There has been an increase in gun violence and gang related crime during 2025.

Factors like these increase public fear and can impact tourism and investor confidence. They also increase strain on law enforcement, the legal, educational and health care systems.

I commend both governments for the strides made and implore this government to do more. Those of you who know what I mean, know what I mean.

Blood Donation

From time to time, we all see and even receive requests to donate blood. I urge all able-bodied persons to give “THE GIFT OF LIFE”, blood. Do not wait until it is our relative in need or, God forbid, we ourselves, before we pay attention. We need a diocesan blood drive where churches and ministries collaborate to get adults and older teens to give blood. Let’s take this seriously and do it.

In this regard, I wish to inform you that I have invited the Public Hospitals Authority to come to the synod premises on Wednesday from 9:30 am to 6:00 pm to facilitate us synod delegates with the donation of blood. If you are able, please make the sacrifice and donate blood.

Physical Health

We need to put more emphasis on physical health, even as we promote spiritual health. We are too unhealthy as nations, and too many of us do a poor job of looking after our bodies: what we eat, exercise, and rest. We owe it to ourselves, our loved ones, and our two societies to do better. Non-communicable diseases are too prevalent and are on the increase, and especially among young people.

Mental Health

We also need to prioritize mental health. Statistics show that mental health issues are on the rise.

Mental illness is a growing concern in world societies. Let us be more sensitive to those around us, my friends, who show signs of emotional and psychological challenge. Please stop just calling people and ourselves “crazy” rather, let us seek help for ourselves and for others.

The incidence of suicide and attempted suicide is also on the rise, especially among young people.

Let us try to be intentional about being our brothers’ and our sisters’ keeper. Too many people are suffering in silence, and more of us could actually make a meaningful difference in someone’s life. Sensitivity is the word. Being open to learn about the reality is key. It calls for compassion, loving others as Christ loves us.

Social Development

And now my final point: There is a need for more of an investment in social development.

It is not a revenue generator, nor does it commend large salaries or other perks. Sometimes public attitude and government priority tends to overlook it. However, when we look at current societal trends, we see that it is an area that needs urgent attention and capital investment.

Investment in human capital is always something that lags behind as no quick return is realized from it. But when you consider that we are witnessing a deterioration of the core values and systems in our lands that ensure proper socialization and community peace - it is actually a great investment.

So many persons carry around scars of trauma from harmful family relationships, traumatic events, unhealthy parental relationships and other emotional realities. The average person is not equipped with the emotional skills or the support system to navigate these realities in their lives.

This can lead to toxic interpersonal relationships, particularly in the parent-child dynamic.

Sadly, this is the reality for so many. We do not connect these issues to crime, but they are direct links often to the violent crimes we witness regularly.

There are skills needed to parent children, manage relationships and stress, and to heal past wounds. Too many children from various socioeconomic backgrounds are raised in homes where these are lacking. Parenting programmes, group counselling and other activities are so important.

There is an increasing number of children going to school every day already mentally and emotionally exhausted due to the environment they live in. They are not allowed to be children because they have to contend with adults who do not know the boundaries that children should not have to cross, or adults who have not found healing themselves so that they can be healthy influences in the lives of children.

In this regard I wish to applaud the works of the Anglican Pastoral Care Ministry in making available several interventions:

1. The Support Group for male and female perpetrators of family violence.
2. The Power-Up Mentoring Programme directed towards 5th-7th graders and CYM groups.
3. Positive Parenting for today, a 12-week Virtual Programme paralleling the National Parenting Programme by the Department of Social Services.

We applaud the government, churches, and private organizations for their efforts in this area, but more resourcing is needed.

MY friends here gathered, I end as I begun: while we have so much that is good happening in our two countries, there is room for improvement. Let us work together as governments, private sectors, churches, social and civic organizations, civil society, neighbourhoods, simple and extended families – AND as individuals.

Let us press on with bringing heaven down to earth and lifting earth to the heights of heaven.

In the name of the Father and the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.