

Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Peace and grace to you in our Lord Jesus Christ.

As many of you are aware, this past July the triennial meeting of the General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada gathered in Vancouver, BC. The Anglican Church of Canada (ACoC) has three levels of structure and governance – each with its own responsibilities and jurisdiction. The General Synod is a federation of the 30 dioceses from across Canada which gathers to address our shared concerns around funding and support for ministry in the North, our relationships with our Indigenous communities, resources for liturgy and worship, the issues which engage us commonly, and issues of doctrine and discipline that are within its purview.

As always, this iteration of the General Synod was wide ranging in the subject matter addressed: Indigenous Self-Determination and ministry, potential changes to the marriage canon relating to Same Sex Marriage, the mission and strategic plan of the General Synod itself, our relationships with other denominations, our relationship and actions on the environment, other issues relating to human trafficking, sustainable development, liturgical resources and, of course, the election of a new Primate.

I will address some key pieces from the proceedings below, but there was more undertaken than can reasonably be described here. For more detailed information on the various happenings and decisions of General Synod 2019, you might check on the General Synod website at gs2019.anglican.ca.

The Mission of the ACoC: In 2010, General Synod adopted a Strategic Plan to guide the work and ministry of the General Synod for a period nine years (by 2019). Synod 2019 passed a resolution to undertake the development of a new Strategic Plan to be completed by GS2022, and passed a further resolution to re-examine the Mission of General Synod.

Indigenous Ministry: The General Synod provided occasion for a significant step forward for Indigenous Self-Determination within the Anglican Church of Canada. The three core pieces of Indigenous ministry in the ACoC are the National Indigenous Anglican Bishop (NIAB - currently Archbishop Mark MacDonald), the Sacred Circle (triennial gathering which functions as the General Synod Equivalent for the Indigenous Church), and the Anglican Council of Indigenous Peoples (ACIP – equivalent of the Council of General Synod for the Indigenous Church). All three of these have been governed by canons in the ACoC. At this General Synod, those canons were amended to give Indigenous Anglicans the legal ability to change the governing conditions on their own for both ACIP and Sacred Circle without the permission of the ACoC, and the NIAB was made an Archbishop and ranked as Metropolitan alongside of the four existing Provincial Metropolitans. In 1993, the Anglican Church of Canada issued an apology to Indigenous peoples for the abuses of the residential schools and in 1994 at a Sacred Circle the National Native Covenant was drafted; that covenant responds to the apology and has become foundational to the work of healing and reconciliation that continues. This General Synod “memorialized” those events – marking particular days in the calendar for celebrating them (August 6th and April 5th respectively) and providing readings and collects for the Eucharist. The Primate also, on behalf of the ACoC, issued a further apology at this Synod for the spiritual harm done to Indigenous peoples. As a diocese, we have been working to further the work toward a self-determining Indigenous Church within the ACoC, particularly through cooperation with the work of the National Indigenous Bishop, the work of our own Indigenous Bishop, The Rt. Rev. Sydney Black (now retired, but still active), and also by seeking to raise up local leadership in our Indigenous congregations. I welcome these developments and hope that we can

further this work, and raise awareness and partnership in ministry between the indigenous and non-indigenous peoples of our church.

The Marriage Canon: In 2016, General Synod passed a “first reading” of a proposed change to Canon XXI on Marriage that sought to change the wording to include “all legally qualified persons” for marriage, and thus include Same Sex Marriages. As a change to a canon related to doctrine and worship, that amendment required to be passed a second time at the subsequent meeting of General Synod in 2019. In preparation for GS2019 the Council of General Synod (COGS) approved and issued “A Word to the Church” (the whole of which can be found at <https://www.anglican.ca/news/a-word-to-the-church-considering-the-proposed-amendment-of-marriage-canon-xxi/30023889/>) which asked General Synod and the whole church to make the following affirmations:

#1 Indigenous Spiritual Self-determination: Whatever the action of the church at this General Synod, we affirm the right of Indigenous persons and communities to spiritual self-determination in their discernment and decisions regarding same-sex marriage.

#2 Diverse Understandings of the Existing Canon: We affirm that, while there are different understandings of the existing Marriage Canon, those bishops and synods who have authorized liturgies for the celebration and blessing of a marriage between two people of the same sex understand that the existing Canon does not prohibit same-sex marriage.

#3 Diverse Understandings and Teachings: We acknowledge the ongoing reality that there is a diversity of understandings and teachings about marriage in the Anglican Church of Canada, and we affirm the prayerful integrity with which those understandings and teachings are held.

#4 Our Commitment to Presume Good Faith: We affirm our commitment to presume good faith among those who hold diverse understandings and teachings, and hold dear their continued presence in this church.

#5 Our Commitment to Stand Together: We affirm our commitment to walk together and to preserve communion, one with another, in Christ, within this church, within our Anglican Communion, and with our ecumenical partners.

These affirmations were presented in the form of a resolution which was put to Synod before the vote on the Marriage Canon. The resolution on the affirmations passed by a very wide margin in all three houses (laity, clergy and bishops). When the amendments to the marriage canon were moved and voted upon, the resolution did not pass the required majority of two-thirds in each of the three houses. There was much pain and anguish at the failure of this amendment for some. The National House of Bishops offered a message as an apology for the hurt caused by the result of the vote.

The document “A Word to the Church” mentioned above outlined the history of the debate concerning SS marriage within the Anglican Church of Canada. The House of Bishops acknowledged that a pattern of “local option” has begun to emerge with regard to marriage in some Dioceses. They also noted, that it is appropriate for some dioceses and jurisdictions to continue in this manner. For some, this has been helpful in light of the canon not being changed. For Calgary, this is an issue of much concern and hurt, particularly for the LGBT members of our church. I recognize and am deeply grieved by the pain this causes. We will, however, continue to abide by the terms of the Marriage Canon and the ACoC constitutional commitments and documents on which it rests.

Primatial Election: The retirement of Archbishop Fred Hiltz as Primate took effect this summer at the end of GS2019, triggering the process for the election of a new Primate. On Saturday, July 13th the Synod elected Archbishop Linda Nicholls to that ministry. She is the 14th Primate and the first woman to hold that office. We look forward to working with her in the coming years.

Faith, Worship and Ministry: Things that come under the purview of Faith, Worship and Ministry Committee are quite diverse. At this General Synod, notable pieces included resolutions on Ecumenical Relationships and Liturgical Resources. On the Ecumenical front, GS2019 affirmed a Statement of Mutual Affirmations and Commitments, continuing our dialogue with the United Church of Canada. Our full communion agreement with our sisters and brothers in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCiC) was expanded to a four-way agreement between ourselves, the ELCiC, the Episcopal Church (US Anglicans), and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America. Also within the realm of the ecumenical was a resolution to affirm the World Council of Churches “Arusha Call to Discipleship”; this document (which can be found at <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/commissions/mission-and-evangelism/the-arusha-call-to-discipleship>) calls for a deepening of Christian Discipleship as the core reality which undergirds and informs mission. In the category of liturgical resources, resolutions were passed approving a set of seasonal forms for the daily office, a new set of alternate collects to better reflect the readings of our three-year lectionary, a collect replacing the BCP’s prayer for the conversion of the Jews with one worked out jointly with the Canadian Rabbinic Caucus, and some other resources that can be found at the national church website. These resources are all available online at <https://www.anglican.ca/about/liturgicaltexts/>.

Public Witness for Social and Ecological Justice: Some of the matters addressed in this area included resolutions to: encourage dioceses to stop the use of Single Use Plastics by 2022; encourage dioceses to further education and action locally on the issue of Human Trafficking; adopt the “Season of Creation” as a new Church season (September 1st to October 4th) and encourage its observance; welcome the new Global Goals for Sustainable Development and encourage dioceses to assess ways to participate. Further information on any of these things can also be found at the Anglican Church of Canada website.

The General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada exists for mutual strength and support amongst its member dioceses, to work together to provide resources on issues of common concern, and decide matters of governance across the church in Canada, the primary purpose of which is to support the work of mission and ministry at the local level. Diocesan Council will have opportunity to consider the various matters raised by General Synod and propose ways that they might be addressed. Your prayers are requested for the work of our Council.

One final piece of noted: The Diocese of Calgary will be hosting the next General Synod in 2022.