The Anglican Diocese of Calgary

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Archbishop's Pastoral Letter
Diocese of Calgary
June 2016

Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Grace and peace to you in the name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

General Synod

The triennial meeting of the General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada will convene in Toronto, on July 7th and run until July 13th, 2016. As you will know, General Synod is responsible for governance and leadership in significant areas of our church's life. Amongst other things, this Synod will address resolutions relating to Physician Assisted Dying, work on liturgical texts, ecumenical relationships, the ministry of deacons, social and ecological justice and proposed changes to the marriage canon to include same-sex marriage. The Diocese of Calgary will be represented at General Synod by Rene Boere, Carol Hayes and Stephen Koning as lay delegates, Sara Gateman as youth delegate, Pilar Gateman, James Robinson and Jane Rowland as clergy delegates and myself. Please pray for your delegates both as we prepare for and participate in the Synod.

Generous Listening

This past January and February we began a "Generous Listening" process in the Diocese of Calgary on the topic of same-sex blessings. The purpose of this process is to engage members of the diocese in conversation in a way that allows people from differing perspectives to hear and understand the perspectives of those with whom they disagree. The process was designed and facilitated for us by Janet Marshall and took place in two parts: first, a gathering of clergy in January; and second, an event for laity repeated in four gatherings in different regions of the diocese. There were 47 who attended the clergy event and 71 who participated in the lay gatherings. Janet Marshall then reported back to diocesan leadership on what was heard and experienced at the meetings. To quote from her report, "*People appreciated how they were able to listen and talk with each other. Regardless of where they stand on the topic of the blessing of same-sex unions, the process allowed people to listen, speak, and feel heard in ways that were surprisingly honest and respectful. Participants heard and acknowledged each other's struggles. They had a better sense of what's at stake for people*" And, "*The listening events were genuine and respectful. There was an open sharing of personal experience and commitments. Participants expressed and heard each other's pain, sorrow, anger, concern, struggle, care, enthusiasms, and hopes. While there is no common mind within the diocese on the blessings of same-sex unions, people are willing to work to understand each other better and discern a response that is pastoral, Spirit-led and expressive of the best of our common Christian life. ... There was general affirmation that people want more of this type of listening within the diocese.*"

Following the gatherings, clergy and lay leadership of the diocese met to discuss next steps. Included in those were the writing of a pastoral letter by me, continuing generous listening processes within the diocese, holding learning events within the diocese focusing on the theological and hermeneutical questions that arose during the listening process, and working to better the knowledge within the diocese of the pertinent documents, decisions, and actions of the Anglican Church of Canada.

In keeping with the report's recommendations, we will begin later this year to provide learning opportunities in which the best of Biblical, theological and other scholarship is engaged to focus on the questions that arose during the listening process and to then engage further listening process gatherings to continue the discussion. I have been in conversation with Janet Marshall about this – more information and dates will be provided in the next while.

As the process of listening and engagement continues to unfold I ask, above all, that you uphold all of this in prayer – asking the leading and discernment of the Holy Spirit for all involved and indeed for the whole of the Diocese of Calgary.

The Mission of the Church

As I write this, I am participating in a consultation on Vital and Healthy Parishes convened by the National church. I am reminded afresh by the discussions that have taken place that we must always keep before us our primary calling to live out our identity as the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church in its Anglican expression. We are to have our actions and common life guided by the Great Commandment to love God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength and our neighbour as ourselves; and by the Great Commission, to "make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I (Jesus) have commanded you." I am reminded that we need to shape the lives our congregations in ways which call people into a life of transformation in Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit – enabling people to become ever more Christ-like. I am reminded that our churches need to be marked by engaging worship, authentic community, formation for discipleship, outreach to the community in witness to God's love and active invitation drawing others into relationship with God in Jesus. I pray that God will, by the power of the Spirit, give us both the will and the way to live into this reality more and more, day by day.

May the peace of God which passes all understanding keep our hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God and of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

In Christ,

+ Gregory Kerr-Wilson

The Most Rev'd Greg Kerr-Wilson
Archbishop of Calgary