

The Anglican Church of Canada

Diocese of Athabasca



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From the desk of
The Rt. Rev. Fraser Lawton

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To the clergy and people of the Diocese of Athabasca

The General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada met recently in Halifax, accompanied by a great deal of speculation and anxiety as to what was going to take place there with the many significant topics for discussion and decision. I am truly grateful for the excellent way our delegates represented us and participated in the affairs of synod. Our Dean, The Very Rev Iain Luke, has been appointed to the Faith, Worship and Ministry Committee – a committee charged with a number of significant tasks over the next triennium.

There are many issues that face our national church. Many places are facing declining population and income, and the effects are felt across the church. It has forced the General Synod to face changes and hard choices around budgets, reorganizing staffing and to ask questions as to how best the national body can pursue its mission. These things continue to provoke discussion across many dioceses, and we are likely to see changes continue. To help make these decisions at the national level, the synod adopted “Vision 2019” which aims to set priorities and direction for the next three triennia. At the core of these is the adoption of the “5 Marks of Mission”, which are the product of the discernment of the whole Anglican Communion. These are things we may embrace whole-heartedly: to proclaim the gospel; to baptize, disciple and teach new believers; to respond to human need with loving service; to seek the transformation of unjust structures in society; and to be good stewards of creation.

Once again the synod invested a great deal of time in discussion around questions of sexuality, specifically the ongoing debate within Canada, and the communion, with regard to the blessing of same-sex unions and the ordination and consecration of people in active homosexual relationships. Many people had expressed a desire to see a clear decision made by the synod. After much consultation, the synod chose instead to issue a statement reflecting where the national church is at this time. (The statement can be found at <http://www.anglican.ca/gsynod2010/atsynod/sdr-june-9-2010/>). There has already been some coverage in the media, including the Anglican Journal. There are several important things that need to be noted in the reception of the statement. It is abundantly clear that there remains a great divide in what various dioceses and church

members think and feel. There is a clear call for continued study and dialogue, especially theological and scriptural in focus. At the same time there was a strong desire to include everyone. No legislative resolution was put forward so that no one would be put in a position of being pushed out: our voice and presence matters to the church.

While there was recognition that there are those who honestly believe it right to authorize these things, no affirmation has been given for any diocese to do so. In fact, there is a clear call for “mutual accountability”, declaring “we are passionately committed to walking together” and “protecting our common life.” These things are only attainable if we all maintain the moratoria* requested by the primates and various church councils** and exercise “gracious restraint.” To do otherwise would violate the intent of the statement and would necessarily precipitate relational consequences. There was a very clear mind expressed on the floor of synod acknowledging that we have not moved away from the definitions of marriage as expressed in Canon XXI, that we have not authorized “local option” and that there is a great desire for discernment and to truly honour one another.

The General Synod has chosen the pursuit of unity over one side of the debate “winning” over another. God seems to have given us further time to truly understand what discernment is and to listen to the Holy Spirit. As we engage with this as a diocese, it must happen on the foundation of a clear understanding of the scriptures and teaching of the church. It is a responsibility we each share to pursue this for ourselves and together as a diocese. We will continue to pursue growing in our own responsibility and ability in living as Anglican Christians so that the world may see Jesus. This is a time for the church to pray, to fast, and to truly engage with the mission God has given us. May God give us the grace to accomplish these things.

I pray God’s grace and peace to fill each of you.

In Jesus Christ, the living Lord,

Rt Rev Fraser Lawton
Bishop of Athabasca

**(to refrain from authorizing the blessing of same-sex unions, consecrating bishops living in same-gender relationships, or cross-border interventions)*

*** (the Windsor Report, Primates meetings of 2005, 2007, and 2009, the 2009 ACC gathering, and Lambeth 2008)*