

The 177th Synod of the Diocese of Huron

Popular Report

May 27-29, 2018

By Brittany Cartwright

If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples. John 8:31

The Anglican Cathedral in London, Ontario was buzzing with friendly faces and conversation as synod attendees arrived and registered for the 177th Synod of the Diocese of Huron with The Rt. Rev'd Linda Nicholls welcoming us all from across the diocese. Of particular note was the excitement and honor felt at having the Primate of the Anglican Church of Canada, Archbishop Fred Hiltz, preside over the opening worship and attend the whole of Synod as an honored guest.

Listening, discerning, and looking to rebuild were themes echoed throughout Bishop Linda's homily, prayers, and all of synod proceedings as she envisioned the Church mirroring the life of St. Francis and St. Clare, these figures of particular potency with her recent time spent in Assisi. She also drew upon the Celtic imagery of "thin places," indicating their power for renewal but also as an aspirational goal of the Church to create. Echoing the call of St. Francis to "rebuild my church" throughout her homily, Bishop Linda noted that we are all apprentices, a more modern term for disciple, living with, practicing, and watching the master that we are in lifelong service with.

After reconvening promptly at 9am on Monday May 28, the Diocese of Huron listened attentively to the Bishop Linda Nicholls as she gave her charge and vision for the diocese in the coming year. In the theme of this year's Synod, "Abiding in God's Word," Bishop Linda reminded the diocese of the importance of daily practices, how 15 minutes of reflection on progress every day can turn into habits that strengthen the church and its members. Regarding the five marks of mission she noted that our diocese is very accomplished with the last three, and that should continue, but we need increased attention and resource paid to the first two (proclaim good news, teach/ nurture believers). She also encouraged those who live near Indigenous churches to visit them, observe and listen to the stories and worship they have to offer. Bishop Linda continues to be committed to reconciliation as a long, sometimes uncomfortable, journey. As a running dialogue amongst most, if not all of her vision, the need for patience, listening, and discernment in community was reinforced.

Following the charge, Synod delved into bible study with a reading from Isaiah – a passage famous for its ending phrase: "Here I am, send me." There were also several laity "faith witness" speakers that were personally invited by Bp. Linda to come and speak before Synod about how they live out their faith in their daily lives. All of these speakers had insightful and unique stories to tell.

Synod was very happy to hear of the strong surplus in this year's budget which brought our overall deficit down to approximately \$94,000.

Some conversation and presentation regarding the Marriage Canon was brought in, bookended by prayer. Delegates and observers alike did express feeling rushed in this discussion, some being confused as to the purpose of this year's dialogue over the previous year. It is conceivable that this confusion was intensified amongst those who were not present at the 176th Synod.

Bishop Linda Nicholls and Archbishop Fred Hiltz were clear in their message that this conversation is one containing inherent fear and anxiety, but also hope. Pain will be felt regardless of the direction it goes – stated both Archbishop Hiltz and Bishop Nicholls – but it is important to preserve a strong desire to walk together in order to help those who fear whether they can reconcile the 2019 decision with their values. The time between General Synod 2019 and any possible implementation in January 2020 will be a space necessary to combat fear and anxiety with faith and love.

Archbishop Hiltz also commented on the likelihood of there being “consequences” handed down from the Anglican Communion should Canada move forward with the proposed changes. In his individual address to Synod, Archbishop Fred had a resounding anthem of “I love you, *en Christo* (in Christ), always” that has become his hope about how the Anglican Church needs to communicate in times of distress and controversy. Abiding in God's Word, becomes abiding in holy friendship, this is the approach he prays for on all matters confronting the church. On Tuesday, in responding to Synod feedback, Bishop Linda quoted Archbishop Desmond Tutu in regards to how the Anglican Church responds in times of conflict stating that “we meet,” Anglicans have a long history of abiding with each other amidst the discomfort.

The Youth of Huron got Synod moving and grooving to oldie tunes with dance moves like the mash potato mambo, the twist, and swing dancing.

Throughout the afternoon presentations were heard from Huron, Renison, and Canterbury Colleges. The Bridge Builders, in particular Roslyn Elm, spoke passionately about systematic oppression and the difference between survival and living. EnviroAction announced that they would be formally merging with the Social Justice committees to create the Committee for Social and Ecological Justice, commonly known as the Justice League of Huron. There were moving videos regarding clean water initiatives immediately prior to Motion 9 calling for continued Indigenous and Biblical education around resource stewardship “in and with, not over Creation.”

On stewardship, we received a presentation about broadening the definition of what constitutes a gift: time and talent are amongst the non-financial ways of giving but other key factors in stewardship are increased awareness of financial state, and expressing gratitude.

After much anticipation the youth presented moving testimonials about their reactions to the suicide tragedies of Attawapiskat, and offering up information about Indigenous Mental Health

initiatives. They also announced their challenge to the Diocese, fundraising for CLAY, in the form of a game. To help finance their trip to Thunder Bay a game was setup at the side of the banquet hall where deaneries could purchase rolls of the dice in order to move their buses on the game-board. The twist was they could also purchase obstacles for other deaneries. Finally, the night was wrapped up with laughter and affectionate stories about the retirees and with Archbishop Fred Hiltz speaking about his time as Primate – the rejoicing and the struggles.

Refreshed after an evening of good food, fellowship, and youth-driven competition, Synod reconvened once again Tuesday morning. Synod dived into Bible study with The Rt. Rev'd Terry Dance who provided insight into the history of Israel and why it is so important in understanding the story of Christ.

The Companion Diocese Committee announced that a small group from the Diocese of Amazonia is coming to Huron! Each deanery is being asked to consider hosting and “touring” the Brazilians through the sacred land they call home.

Feedback was heard from Monday's discussion on the Marriage Canon. Bishop Linda responded to the summary asking the Church not to expect General Synod elected members to be able to represent all voices since that is impossible. Instead we elect them on the basis that we see these people as trusted, faithful individuals who will listen, pray, discern, and vote with the Spirit on their heart, said Bishop Linda. In terms of the points of discouragement, Bishop Linda responded with understanding of the frustration but remaining true to the canonical process of the church. The Bishop assured those who were concerned about each diocesan bishop's right to “say no even if the vote is yes” that she, along with every other Bishop in the Anglican Church of Canada, takes their responsibility of their position with the utmost seriousness and attention to what is best for their diocese.

We heard from the Huron Hunger Fund, PWRDF, the College of Deacons, Congregational Coaches, Refugee Committee, and Monica Place – all reflecting upon the work they have been doing in the past year and their hopes and plans for the future. Synod was wrapped up with the only new business arising being an impassioned plea from a delegate to get to know refugee families – a task stressful work but joyfully so.

Synod concluded with a familiar prayer to most Anglicans – the doxology. Glory and thanks be to God!

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