

Archbishop Fred Hiltz, Primate
The Synod of the Diocese of Huron
May 27 – 29, 2018

Two and a half weeks ago I was in Havana in Cuba for a special meeting of the Synod of the Episcopal Church of Cuba (IEC – Iglesia Episcopal de Cuba) regarding its reintegration into The Episcopal Church. Cuba has been an extra-provincial diocese for some fifty years owing to the political tensions between the United States (of America) and Cuba. In all those years, the Diocese has looked to a Metropolitan Council of Cuba consisting of the Primate of The Anglican Church of Canada, the Primate of The Province of the West Indies, and the Presiding Bishop of The Episcopal Church. Our task is to provide pastoral oversight and guidance to the Bishop and the Synod.

In 2015, the Synod in Cuba voted to request re-integration into The Episcopal Church. While the process has been long and tedious, it would appear that both Churches are now well positioned for a vote at the General Convention of The Episcopal Church in July.

The purpose of the special meeting of Synod a couple of weeks ago was deliberation as to which Province in The Episcopal Church, the Iglesia Episcopal de Cuba would be membered. Province II was chosen (comprised of the dioceses of Albany, Central New York, Convocation of Episcopal Churches in Europe, Haiti, Long Island, New Jersey, New York, Newark, Rochester, The Virgin Islands, and Western New York).

I share this with you by way of context for sharing a moment of grace just before the Eucharist that began the Synod when we were robing in the diocesan center. One of the clergy, Armando, whom I have known for some time, a quiet man and a good priest, came into the room and laid his vestments over a chair. As he spotted me in a corner, he came over to greet me. As we embraced he said, “I love you en Christo”. And then he leaned back, looked into my eyes, and said, “Always!” I looked at him and said, “And I love you too in Christo!” It was a moment I shall not forget.

Armando has been ordained for some thirty years. I have visited his parish and seen the temples where his congregations meet. I have had lunch in his little apartment. I have seen him well and I have seen him quite ill (with stomach, back and neck ailments). When I saw him this time, I thought he looked so much better. He is a faithful priest, loyal in every way to his bishop, supportive of diocesan initiatives and serves the Synod as Secretary of the Resolutions Committee.

That brief encounter before that Synod Eucharist was one I will not forget. It said a lot about Armando, a lot about me, a lot about our life “en Christo”. It said a lot about the kind of respect and affection that has marked the relationship between our Church and the Church in Cuba.

Cuba has been one of our principal Global Partners for fifty years. The Primate chairs the Metropolitan Council of Cuba (MCC). It was my responsibility to oversee the process of an appointment of a new diocesan bishop in 2009. Our Church has supported the core budget for ministry across the diocese, for theological education and a host of diocesan initiatives including its own Development Office. There is in the Iglesia Episcopal de Cuba in all honesty, some anxiety as to what kind of relationship they will have with our church post reintegration into The Episcopal Church.

In that simple embrace, in those few words, “I love you en Christo always”, Armando was expressing a heartfelt gratitude for the friendship we have enjoyed and heartfelt yearning that it find a continued expression albeit in a different sort of way now. His gesture toward me was a beautiful expression of the very theme of your Synod, “Being Disciples – Abiding in God’s Word”.

It is a wonderful theme for Synod – beautifully Johannine. It takes me perhaps you too, back into the Upper Room and that Farewell Discourse Jesus has with the disciples. I prefer to call it the Abiding Conversation into which Jesus draws his Church in every generation. That conversation out of which we know who we are and what we are called to be about in the world. That we belong to one another in him. That we have been chosen and appointed to go and bear fruit. Fruit that shall last. That we are to be community bearing the marks of radical friendship continually nourished and renewed through his love and grace.

Friendship can be strong and fragile, forged and broken, nurtured and betrayed, won and lost, celebrated and grieved. We ask for the Lord’s grace to nurture our friendships even across deep differences of theological conviction. The friendship of which I speak, finds expression in our quest for language that will bring us to better dialogue in which we seek to understand each other not just justify or defend, but to enter into a deep and holy conversation in which we each learn something more about the other and what informs their point of view.

That we are to be a community of disciples having an eye and an ear, and a heart “for the world. We are as the great 2013 World Council of Churches document puts it to be a Church “In and For the World”.

I am always struck by the movements of Jesus in the Upper Room, from the table to that down on the floor ministry of washing the feet of his disciples, and to the teaching that follows it. From his talk of abiding in Him – “communion” to our serving in His name and love and “commission”. From his talk of the coming of the Holy Spirit to bring to the remembrance of the disciples all that he has taught them, to word of the Spirit in revealing things yet to be known. From that moment when he prays for himself and for his consecration to his prayer for the disciples, and then to all those who will come to believe through their word. Into that deep conversation and that beautiful prayer we are drawn.

“Being Disciples” - followers of Jesus. There is much talk about it these days. Indeed, it is a focus of much conversation throughout the Anglican Communion. The Anglican Consultative Council has called for a Season of International Discipleship.

This call speaks to the breadth of our discipleship – worship, study, the company we keep in serving others in His name, political choices we make, care of the earth. It impacts how we understand baptism, prepare people for that great gospel sacrament, and how we prepare ourselves for the renewal of our vows, how we prepare people for an exemplary way of living out one vow or another through a particular ministry for which they are called and formed.

Alongside “Discipleship” is the word “Evangelism”. How do we understand it?

The most effective form of evangelism is a community that is living out the fullness of the Gospel. The Marks of Mission are embraced. They have taken hold. The Gospel is being proclaimed. People are being nurtured for life long discipleship. The poor are being tended with compassion. The Church’s voice is being heard in the public square. The church is promoting the care of creation and helping people to abide by their first vocation, - to be good stewards of God’s creation.

Being Disciples and abiding in God’s Word from a Communion Perspective.

It is of course, no secret that our Anglican Communion has and continues to live with much tension over issues of human sexuality, particularly the blessing of same sex marriage. Some speak of actions taken by some Provinces as tearing the fabric of the Communion. Some speak of consequences for decisions taken by some Churches in amending their Canons on marriage. Some remind us of the distinction between core doctrine that is creedal and the rest of the Church’s teaching which in large part is catechetical, pastoral or prophetic.

In the mix of much tension came a gift to our beloved Communion in 2007. TEAC (Theological Education in the Anglican Communion) produced a document called “Signposts on a Common Journey”. It captures the spirit and ethos of our Anglican way of being Disciples abiding God’s Word.

It reminds us of four truths, that we are:

- formed by scripture,
- shaped by liturgy,
- ordered for communion, and
- directed by God’s mission.

I shall focus for just a few moments on:

Ordered for Communion.

The Communion of which this document speaks is the very communion of which we read in St. Paul’s writings, in his image of the Church as the Body of Christ, everyone members one

of another, each having respect for the other, everyone showing forbearance in love and in unity of the spirit into the bonds of peace.

The communion of which this document speaks, calls to mind the outcome of the Anglican Congress held in Toronto in 1963. It opened with Howard Clark's great line "if there is to be a re-birth of our Communion, it must be a re-birth in loving service to the world." It concluded with the articulating of the great principle of MRI – "Mutual Responsibility and Interdependence in the Body of Christ". In years to come, that one great principle would be expanded into Partnership, which continues to shape and guide the life of the Communion as a whole.

Anglicans have often spoken of the "bonds of affection" by which we are drawn and held together in Christ. In recent years, the stress and strains with the Communion have moved some to call for enhanced authority on the part of the Archbishop of Canterbury and meeting of the Primates.

For some time the Communion as a whole was grappling with a Covenant. Sections I, II, and III – OK good, but Section IV was problematic. For some it felt punitive, and for others not punitive enough.

Into the mix of all those conversations, our church made very helpful contributions arising from our own grappling with the Covenant.

And then came the principle of Indaba, an African way of engaging one another in conversation marked by intentional listening and respectful speaking. It was the process by which the bishops were engaged at Lambeth in 2008.

At that conference Archbishop Colin Johnson hosted a reception for Canadian and African bishops who might be interested in dialogue across difference. Difference in cultural, social, political contexts. Differences across theological and pastoral perspectives.

So was born what has become known as the Dialogue. It has met annually for the last nine years and producing at the conclusion of each gathering a testimony. They are very fine documents that have much to contribute to our understanding of what it means to be disciples abiding in God's word.

The tenth gathering will be here in London this summer and hosted by Bishop Linda Nicholls. The plan as I understand it is that at Lambeth 2020 the Consultation of Anglican Bishops in Dialogue will give testimony to the blessing and grace this Dialogue has been for them personally and for their Churches.

I want to lift up the work of this Dialogue as a gift to the entire Communion because it speaks of how we can maintain communion across difference and how we can continue to hold one another in the bonds of affection.

I also want to lift up the labours of a Working Group appointed by the Archbishop of Canterbury arising from conversations at the January 2018 Meeting of the Primates. It is a group appointed to help us restore relationships, to rebuild trust and to heal our rifts.

There is a call from the Group, for a Season of Repentance and Renewal in anticipation of Lambeth 2020. May of us eagerly await the kind of resources - liturgical/pastoral needed for this work.

There are huge efforts across the Communion and within a number of Provinces with respect to the need for attention to good and healthy conflict, and respectful conversation using holy manners. Indeed this continues to be a huge challenge in our Church as we move into a Second Reading to amend the Canon on Marriage at General Synod next year. Learnings from General Synod 2016 taken into account as we plan for next year.

The models used for conversation in provinces and dioceses between General synods have been quite good in some places. The Diocese of Huron in my estimation is at the head of the parade – the process, the findings, the queries, the concerns, the hopes you have raised are enormously helpful contributions to the work of the General Synod Planning Committee.

In the midst of all our tensions in the Communion, I take heart always in this.

- That without fail we continue to uphold one another in prayer through the Anglican Cycle of Prayer throughout the world.
- We continue to stand in solidarity with those churches within our Communion that are suffering great hardship through poverty, corruption and governmental persecution. We seek through our letters and calls for action to bear one another's burdens and so fulfil the Law of Christ.
- We continue to celebrate Companion Diocese Relationships and Province-to-Province Relationships.

We continue to explore the nature of partnership in changing times and partnership in the interests of mutual fellowship and support in living the Gospel of Christ and in rallying around major issues of common concern to the entire human family. I think of what the Churches are doing together to combat Human Trafficking and to address Climate Change and the alarming rate at which it is accelerating in some places.

Human Trafficking:

- Something about this evil that stalks our earth.
- Origin - Transfer
 - Destination
- Canada
- Poor
- Indigenous

Climate Change:

- Melting ice cap
- Rising seas
- Expanding deserts
- Wreckless practices in extracting mineral resources

A major topic at General Synod 2019

Finally a very quick word in the spirit of “Being Disciples- Abiding in God’s Word”. About I am about to extend an invitation to all Anglicans throughout Canada as we mark the 125th anniversary of the founding of the General Synod.

“In September 2018, the 125th anniversary of General Synod, I am inviting the Church to listen to its heartbeat—launching 10 months of ‘conversation circles’ which will take place all across the country.

Conversation circles are guided by the 4 simple steps set out below, that will help Anglicans speak from the heart about their faith: where the holy is experienced in our lives, what moves us to pray, and what makes our hearts lift—or ache.

I am inviting all Canadian Anglicans to listen carefully to their experiences of how God has touched their hearts, and to share their prayer for our beloved church with one another.

We will reflect and pray on words of Jesus from the Gospel of John

1. Ask someone to read this passage from John (*John 15.12-17*).

[Jesus said,] “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.”

We will be invited to

- a. describe a time when our church made your heart glad;
- b. describe a time when our church made your heart ache; and
- c. describe a time when our church gave you hope.

The conversation will conclude with an invitation for people to share their heartfelt prayer for our Church.

I hope everyone will find this to be a good way for us to be refreshed in our calling to “Be Disciples, abiding in God’s Word”.

To be as those who can turn to one another and say with my friend in Cuba “I love you, en Christo...always.”