

Report on the 44th Algoma Synod

On October 21, 2009 after a long drive, Brianna and I arrived in Sault Ste. Marie. Bishop Andrew welcomed us as we entered the Synod office to retrieve our information packages. The continuous downpour did not dampen our spirits as we eagerly anticipated the start of this important meeting of our Diocese which happens only every two years. I will try to highlight some of the events and discussions.

On Thursday morning after a quick shuttle from the hotel all the lay and clergy gathered in St. Luke's Cathedral for the opening Eucharist. The service began with the clergy and our Bishop filing in while the magnificent organ and voices filled the church with sound. The cathedral is a beautiful church. I sensed the unity of Christians sharing faith. The Bishop read his "Charge", where he spoke of his gratitude, his election and consecration. He also spoke of the core values as part of the Strategic plan endorsed by Executive Council earlier this year. Bishop Andrew asked us to exercise restraint in devising and deploying new worship forms. As one of our core values, our liturgy supports us as "authentic and joyful" Anglicans. In the coming month Bishop Andrew will "discuss strategies for enhancing music, preaching and Eucharistic presidency."

Another core value, the growth of healthy churches includes fiscal responsibility. A new Diocesan employee will be hired, known as the Congregational Development Officer. Spreading the good news through evangelism is another core value which will help us "perpetuate" our Church, make us known to others by word and deed – "faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour". There is a powerful message in the way we live our lives.

Another core value is a commitment to caring, ongoing relationships where we realize how much we need one another. Social justice is the final core value which means seeking Christ in all persons and living in harmony with the environment. Bishop Andrew spoke about Christ and how He served mankind, His compassion. The seven core values are our guide as Anglicans.

The afternoon featured information sessions where we could choose the session that most interested us. I attended the session on the Core Values facilitated by Rev. Deborah Kraft. The goal is to take these strategies, arrived at after much consultation and develop a healthy, joyful and outreaching parish. There is a timeline in place for the strategic plan. A new website will provide our Diocese with communication and information. The "Listening Process" was an amazing session with Dr. Brace, a professor from Sudbury. She stressed the need to find empathy and a way to speak to one another in our diverse congregations worldwide. She gave us a history on the issue of "same sex blessings" within the Anglican Church. She spoke about "Inaba" groups, a meeting for purposeful discussion among equals, stressing that decision making by all interested parties is a long process. On Friday evening we were fortunate to hear two speakers, an African priest, Dr. Ahkiri and Dr. Brace each speaking from his and her own beliefs and faith. The most important element in these powerful messages was the need to respect one another and listen without judgment. Afterward in our groups we tried to emulate the process by sharing our own thoughts as members of this community of faith. The effort to share and listen without judgment is a compelling process. We are all sincere in our beliefs and should respect the right of all people to name themselves and their experiences.

On Friday we also heard from Nick Brotherwood, a Minister to Youth who spoke about "Fresh Expressions". He stated enthusiastically, the need for our church to adapt to changing culture. Fresh Expressions is mainly for the benefit of people who are not yet members of any church. For example, an innovative idea is: "Church on Tap" which has evolved for people who would not come to church but met in a pub with

discussion and the sacraments. He suggested that we should look at church at different times, for different networks and cultures. There is less knowledge of the faith today so church should be for beginners. There is a deeper spiritual hunger so church should be for the “disconnected explorers”. There is a website for help and information in Canada: freshexpressions.ca. The opportunities for mission are endless and need to be shared.

On Saturday Synod discussion on the Strategic plan continued with a motion to accept the plan. There are 4 steps to achievement: plan purposefully; prepare prayerfully; proceed positively; pursue persistently.

Congratulations to Brianna Locke on her confirmation as a Diocesan Youth Delegate.

Our Diocese has recently moved our archives to Algoma University. The Director of the Library, who has done extensive work on the archives spoke on this subject.

Jeffrey Hooper, theological student at Wycliffe College and his wife, a veterinarian made a presentation on their mission work in Uganda. The cultural differences are something we can learn from as we are part of a global community.

We heard a well expressed response to the Bishop’s charge. Before we concluded with Eucharist two resolutions came from the floor and were unanimously passed. One concerned urging a settlement and a return to talk for the steelworkers in Sudbury. The second was in support of urgency for our government to seek a solution to the forestry industry crisis in Northwestern and Northeastern Ontario.

Elections were held for clergy and lay people to attend the National Synod to be held in Halifax next year.

This was my first Synod and an enlightening experience of learning, sharing and feeling renewed as an Anglican. I am grateful for the opportunity and would be happy to discuss or answer any questions.

Respectfully,
Cynthia Cooper
Synod Delegate