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On the eve of General Synod: A note from Archbishop Anne to the people of God in
Algoma and Moosonee

“I have called you by name”

Isaiah 43:1

July 5, 2019

Dear friends,

Next week delegates from across the country will be travelling to Vancouver to attend the General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada. Important matters will be discussed and decided upon at this Synod. A new Primate will be elected. There will be conversations about a self-determining Anglican Indigenous Church, and a vote on an amendment to Canon 21, the Marriage Canon, will be held. But this is not all that will be happening in Vancouver. Our time at General Synod will be bookended with the celebration of Holy Eucharist, and every day there will be Bible Studies and Morning and Evening Prayer. There will be opportunities for fellowship, and to listen to each other's stories of life and faith. We will be saying “farewell and thank you” to our beloved Primate, Archbishop Fred. On Sunday 14th July, delegates will be visiting parishes around Vancouver and sharing in their time of morning worship. All of this will make it a full and rich time.

For some there is great anticipation and excitement to be part of the decision-making body of our church and to be representing their diocese. Having the opportunity to meet Anglicans from very different contexts and settings than their own, to learn and pray with them, and be engaged in heated debate or casual conversation will be an extraordinary opportunity and experience. For others this will be a time of great anxiety as they are called upon to make difficult decisions which will have an impact on our church in the future.

Others not attending General Synod in person, but who have been following what will be coming before this Synod with great interest, will be watching from the sidelines, keenly interested in what will transpire. Social media is already buzzing - people are posting and blogging, and I expect this will only increase in the coming days. For those of you who are very active on social media, I ask you to be conscious of the stewardship and care of your words, that they reflect Christian values, serve the Kingdom, and build up the church.

This is my first General Synod, and I share many of the same emotions that others are feeling at this time. I'm excited about the experience of being in such a large synod, and my anxieties are often over things I can't control. Like so many of you, I have been praying for the Vancouver gathering for a long time. My deepest prayer is for all that is said and done to be permeated by God's Spirit of peace and good will.

I remind you of the motion that came out of Algoma's recent Diocesan Synod: "That this Synod encourage Anglicans throughout Algoma to pray fervently for Archbishop Hiltz, Archbishop Anne, and our delegates to General Synod both now and during the July meetings." To this I add praying after Synod, too. Regardless of the outcome of any decision made, let us remain connected to our fellow members in the Body of Christ, and find ways to support them if they are struggling with what has taken place. I will be here for you as your bishop, walking with you into the future God has in store for us and our beloved church. In the end, the Anglican Church of Canada is God's church and God has us all in God's strong hands.

There are a few verses from Paul's letter to the Philippians that have been resonating with me over the last few weeks, and I want to share some of my reflections with you.

"Rejoice in the Lord always, again I say rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus." (Phil. 4.4-7)

As those who have been 'called by name,' Paul issues to us the imperative to 'rejoice always,' regardless of the circumstances around us. We can be people of joy, not the fleeting, transient kind of joy that is here one moment and gone the next, but rather a joy that is deeply rooted in an ongoing relationship with our faithful God. This relationship is built on a trust that is able to negotiate difficult and challenging moments in ways that we don't always understand, but which will ultimately work for the good of all.

Paul goes on to say that in our relationships with others we have a choice about how we are to be with them. He exhorts us to embody 'gentleness,' knowing that emotions often run high and the temptation towards anger is often more visible, especially when we disagree. Then there is sage, but difficult advice. "Do not worry about anything." I don't think Paul is saying that there isn't anything in our lives to worry about, or that our worries and concerns, particularly about General Synod are unimportant. We are being asked to place those worries in the context of our overall relationship with God, doing so in a posture of thanksgiving, even before we know the outcome of our prayer requests.

Doing this is a beautiful expression of our friendship with God, of our confidence that we are ultimately held by a loving, faithful, and sovereign God. “He’s Got the Whole World in His Hands” is the song that comes to mind. Perhaps we could add that God’s got the Anglican Church of Canada in God’s hands.

Finally, Paul announces God’s promise of the gift of peace, which we cannot understand in this present context or setting, but which is of Jesus Christ, our Risen Lord who stood in the midst of his fearful followers and breathed his Holy Spirit upon them. I pray that next week and every week we will feel the Spirit’s breath upon us.

In the One who has called us by name, I remain yours in prayer and service,

+ Anne

