

## Synodical Governance

Our Diocesan Synod will be convening in September in Sault Ste. Marie. "Synod" is a Greek word meaning "together on the road". In the early Church, synods were primarily meetings of bishops coming together to ensure the uniformity of Christian belief, teaching and practice as the Church grew in numbers and spread across the Roman Empire and beyond. What makes a Synod distinct from any other Church gathering is that a Synod can enact Canons (Church laws) that are enforceable on its members.

Before the Reformation in England the lay people had little voice in the running of the Church. As in the early Church it was governed by the bishops and senior clergy through the Convocations (a form of Synod) with the Pope in Rome exercising final authority in appeals on matters of controversy or church law. After the Reformation in England, the authority of the Pope was replaced by that of "*the King in Parliament.*" The laity now had a significant role in the running of the English Church exercised through the lay members of Parliament. This new power of the laity through Parliament became so strong that for several centuries it required an Act of Parliament to change the boundaries of an English parish.

The colonization of North America by England from the 1600's onwards created a distinct problem for settlers who wanted an active role in running their local Anglican churches. These settlers could not elect Members to Parliament in England. How, then, could they have a voice in the affairs of the Church in their new homes away from England? How could they share with the colonial bishops and clergy responsibility for the Church's well-being and contribute to its advancement? Balancing this, if a way could be found to give such power to the laity in the colonial Church, how was the colonial bishop to continue to exercise his apostolic authority, particularly for the areas of belief and teaching? How could the voice of the clergy be heard and their interests properly considered as well?

Anglicans came up with a unique solution. Colonial dioceses were established and local diocesan Synods were convened with three partners: the bishop, the clergy, and the lay representatives of the people. Each partner could exercise a veto over the Synod's decisions. Because of this, whatever was decided by a synod would have to be an agreement between the bishop, the clergy, and the lay delegates. Today, we are the heirs of this solution brought into being a century and a half ago. Each of the acts of our Synod is passed by the votes of the lay and clergy members voting together and requires the concurrence of the bishop. As a further safeguard, any Motion can also be put to a "vote by orders" requiring the separate majority votes of the clergy and laity members of our Synod to pass.

Our Canadian Synods have an early history. The Canadian bishops, meeting in Quebec in 1851, called for the development of this kind of synod. No doubt a key motivation was to create among the laity a sense of ownership and responsibility for the developing churches in the colonial period.

In its early days, what is now the diocese of Algoma was part of the diocese of Toronto. In 1853 Toronto's first Bishop, John Strachan, called together a 'Convention' of clergy and elected representatives of parishes in the Toronto diocese. This convention declared itself to be a synod able to enact Canons. This was followed by a similar Nova Scotia decision in 1854. The subsequent period saw a growing awareness of the advantages of this kind of synodical governance and it spread throughout the British Empire and eventually was adopted in England, itself, in 1919.

Certain matters, such as doctrine, are beyond the jurisdiction of diocesan synods. As well, there are synods held nationally and in the four ecclesiastical provinces of the Anglican Church in Canada. They have particular responsibilities spelled out in the applicable constitution and canons. The General (national) Synod deals with matters affecting the whole Canadian Church like the text of the Prayer and Hymn books as well as matters such as faith, worship, and discipline in which it makes sense to have one standard across the country.

The Ontario Provincial Synod focuses on matters such as social advocacy with the provincial government, support for the day-to-day administrative work of our dioceses, and programs and commissions like the Ontario Provincial Commission on Theological Education which brings together representatives of the dioceses, the bishops, and the colleges involved in theological education in Ontario.

Our Canadian bishops meet nationally in a House of Bishops and attend the international meeting of Anglican bishops at the Lambeth Conference every ten years. They hold a unique apostolic responsibility for the teaching, sacramental life, and discipline of our Church. Anglicans recognize, however, that our Church's teachings cannot just be handed down from "on high". Although diocesan synods cannot set doctrine, they can discuss, debate and respond to the teachings of the bishops and the canons and resolutions of the national and provincial synods.

Diocesan synods do have the power to make binding decisions for all the parishes within the diocese in those matters over which the diocesan Synod has jurisdiction. This means that Anglicans have a corporate rather than a congregational polity. We have a high level of mutual accountability in comparison to many Protestant churches where congregations are independent or more loosely associated with one another than we are.

Before our Synod passes a canon there must be a thirty-day notice period, and it must pass in each order of the laity and the clergy by a two-thirds majority in a single Synod or by majorities in two consecutive Synods. Normally, changes to canons cannot be made until there is a broad level of consensus that the changes are consistent with scripture, the Catholic faith, and the will of the Spirit.

Synods can be a confusing experience for new delegates. There is a mountain of material to read. Difficult ethical questions may be debated. There will be many things to learn about the different agencies and activities of the Church in the diocese, in Canada, and around the world. There is never enough time to discuss everything fully. Confusing as things

may be at some moments during a Synod session there are always people around who are only too pleased to be asked for help or advice.

As Anglicans we believe that this working together is part of what it means to be the Body of Christ. We are bound together in mutual care and concern for one another. We are linked in a common effort with the Anglican Communion around the world. As Anglicans we have a role and a voice in the entire Christian family.

***“...we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another.” (Romans 12: 5)***

Please pray for your Synod delegates. Please pray for our Synod. Please pray for our common life as a diocese.