



Report to Canadian Anglicans from the House of Bishops

Meeting of April 14 – 18, 2008, Mount Carmel Spiritual Centre, Niagara Falls, Ont.

April 18, 2008

A year ago, we met in this same place under a different Primate and in the company of the Archbishop of Canterbury. It is hard, as Archbishop Fred Hiltz, our new Primate, said in his opening reflections, not to be mindful of all the changes that a year can bring. Changes are always with us. In our opening session, we welcomed two new members – Bishops Linda Nicholls of Toronto, and Jane Alexander of Edmonton – and in a rare but fortunate event, we re-welcomed Bishop Gordon Beardy who left us several years ago and who returns to the House as assistant Bishop of Keewatin. We welcomed retired Archbishop Terry Finlay of Toronto who has agreed to be our chaplain. We offered congratulations and prayers to Bishop Victoria Matthews on her election as Bishop of Christchurch, New Zealand. We welcomed the appointment of Bishop Nicholls to the Primate’s Theological Commission. And we said goodbye to Bishop Charles Arthurson, who was attending his last meeting of the House of Bishops.

The meeting just ended exemplifies the many roles that we, the Bishops of the Church, play. We dealt with the business of the church, hearing reports on residential schools, on pensions, from the International Anglican Women’s Network and on theological education. We also spent a full day together privately, sharing our experiences of the many difficult aspects of Episcopal ministry.

On the first evening of our gathering, we heard a report and some reflections from Archbishop Fred Hiltz, now nearing the end of his first year as Primate. Archbishop Fred gave us a printed report on his activities and travels, which have been considerable, and supplemented the report with what he called “snapshots” – moments that have remained with him in memory. We were struck by two phrases that he used again and again. He described people in meetings and communities and other places he visited as “being as one” in their love for the church and he also spoke again and again of people who share with him their pride in being Anglican and engaged in God’s mission.

On our first full day of this gathering, we met in a private session to consider the life and unity of the Canadian Church and of the Anglican Communion of which we are a part. This was a day of deep reflection and sharing, a day that brought some pain, but also a day of hope as we listened to each others’ stories and were reminded once again of all that we share and of the deep

affection we have one for another. It was good to listen to each others' stories and, in so doing, to encourage each other. We responded to a letter from Bishop Donald Harvey on behalf of the Anglican Network in Canada. In the midst of these challenges, we repeat that we have put in place a process for shared episcopal ministry, and that we continue to be a Church to which all are welcome.

The day also included presentations by Canadian members of the Covenant Design Group, charged by the Archbishop of Canterbury with drafting a covenant for the approval of the member provinces of the Communion. The covenant is meant to be an expression of our Communion and is now in its second draft, which we agree, is an improvement over the first. We were also briefed by Bishop George Bruce on the Canadian response to the drafts of the Covenant and we shared our responses with him. A document on the Canadian response will go to the Council of General Synod next month.

Not surprisingly, since this is the last time we will gather as a House before this summer's Lambeth Conference of all the bishops of the Communion, we spent considerable time talking about that and hearing from those who have attended before. This was a sweeping conversation covering everything from the agenda and available bursaries to proper attire and what the living accommodations are like.

The last time we met, we instituted a practice of inviting several bishops per meeting to introduce their dioceses to us, and to tell us of the challenges and joys that they experience. This time we heard profiles on the dioceses of Central Newfoundland, Ontario and Brandon.

We also heard a report from Bishop Mark MacDonald, now well into his second year as National Indigenous Bishop. We were heartened to hear him tell us that it appears that in the creation of the position of National Indigenous Bishop, the "Anglican Church of Canada understood a primal reality of indigenous life and unleashed imagination that we had never anticipated."

We were given an update on residential schools and on the work being done in support of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission whose members have yet to be announced by the federal Government. We heard from Archbishop Fred about the church leaders' tour that he was involved in to raise public awareness of the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. We were struck by the tremendous debt of gratitude that we and the Church owe to General Synod Archivist Nancy Hurn, and other diocesan archivists, who are involved in challenging and ground-breaking work in making sure that the Church lives up to its obligations in providing access to information contained in documents in its possession.

A staff delegation from the Primate's World Relief and Development Fund briefed us on the history, work and mission of this Anglican ministry and shared with us some of the ambitious plans they are making to celebrate the Primate's Fund's 50th anniversary in less than two years. The Primate's Fund exemplifies the very best work that a church can do in reaching out to the developing world and in responding to natural and human disasters.

Our days, when we meet, are framed by prayer. We begin the day with Eucharist, followed by morning prayer and Bible study. We end with night prayers. We continue to be grateful to God for the privilege of being in ministry with the whole Church.