

The Anglican Church of Canada



L'Église anglicane du Canada

Office of the Primate

80 Hayden Street, Toronto, Ontario M4Y 3G2

www.anglican.ca • primate@national.anglican.ca • Tel: (416) 924-9199 ext. 276 • Fax: (416) 924-0211

An address by Archbishop Fred Hiltz, Primate of the Anglican Church of Canada, delivered on New Year's Day 2014 at Christ Church Cathedral in Ottawa.

One thing only is necessary...

"Be close to Jesus."

That was the word given to a religious community called the Ventrella Sisters who were looking for spiritual counsel in advance of Advent and Christmas some years ago. The word was that of Padre Pio of Pietrelciana. His counsel was in fact his own life-long quest and his premier advice to all his spiritual children.

"Be close to Jesus." The counsel is simple, direct, and engaging. It compels me to read the Christmas story in a way that sees how everyone is endeavouring to draw close to the Christ child. The angels are bending near the earth. The shepherds are lingering at the manger.

From a much greater distance the Magi who have seen his natal star begin a long journey to see the new born king.

When the child is presented in the temple, in accordance with the law, Simeon takes him in his arms and blesses God, declaring him to be the glory of Israel and a light to the nations.

Anna who spends all her days in the temple gives thanks to God for the child and she speaks of him to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

Living the Marks of Mission

www.anglican.ca/marks

"Be close to Jesus," said the Padre. Be close to him in the manger, at the riverbank, on the mountain side, in the fields, in the market place, in the courts of the Lord, at the foot of his cross, and at the throne of his mercy. Be close to him in his deep love for the world for its redemption, healing and peace.

All our mothers and fathers in the Faith have encouraged us to be close to Christ so that "his sweet fragrance might linger wherever we go."

The Padre's counsel is reflected in the ministry of Pope Francis and the simplicity with which he lives and speaks to the masses who gather to hear him. They are hearing how important it is to be close to Jesus — and his words and ways with the world. The Padre's counsel is also reflected in the ministry of our Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, whose focus is on evangelism and reconciliation. Early in office, he said, "We are in a time of revolution in the world and we need another revolution in the Church. What it looks like I don't know, but I want to be in it. What it feels like is Jesus centered, fire filled, peace proclaiming, disciple making, and the church word for this revolution, is revival."

Our National Indigenous Anglican Bishop, Mark MacDonald, speaks of a spiritual movement among indigenous peoples in Canada and around the world — a revival of faith and hope, the heart of which is a way of engaging the scriptures called Gospel Based Discipleship. The gospel of the day is read three times. After the first reading this question is asked. "What word, idea, sentence, stands out for you?" After the second, "What is Jesus saying to you?" and the third, "What is Jesus calling you to do?"

This past summer I read a biography of Archbishop Howard Clarke the 9th Primate of our beloved church. When he was elected in 1959 he was asked what his vision for the church would be. He said "What I want to see is that the church bear the marks of its Lord and Head, Jesus the Son of God." Clarke often spoke of the great adventure that is Christ and he asked challenging questions of the Church.

Do Christians really understand the world, and its social political, and economic realities?

Do we understand the sacrificial character of the actions that will meet these realities and help transform them?

Are we prepared to be a servant church?

Clarke's own personal closeness to Christ proved to be a transforming influence not only in our own church, but within the Anglican Communion. The prayer he wrote for the Toronto Congress in 1963 continues to be prayed throughout the world.

"Draw your church together, O Lord, into one great company of disciples, together following our Lord Jesus Christ into every walk of life, together serving him in his mission to the world, and together witnessing to his love on every continent and island. We ask this in his name and for his sake."

Only as we are "close to Jesus" can we be this kind of a church.

I am happy to say that this coming Lent and Easter our church is being offered a wonderful opportunity to explore and deepen our discipleship as individuals and as parish communities. Heartily endorsed by all our bishops, it is entitled "Becoming the Story We Tell: Renewing our engagement with Christ crucified and risen." I commend this resource for widespread use across our beloved church, so that in our witness to Christ and his gospel, we may go from strength to strength.

I am also pleased to commend to our whole church the 2013 World Council of Churches publication, *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*. It is a 69-paragraph document, the result of some 20 years of convergence in ecumenical conversations around the world. It speaks to God's mission and the unity of the church, it celebrates a growing in that communion for which Jesus prays, and it speaks to the church's vocation in and for the world.

I must confess it's the fourth chapter "The Church In and For The World" that grabs my attention. Paragraph 64 reads, in part

"The world that God so loved is scarred with problems and tragedies which cry out for the compassionate engagement of Christians. The source of their passion for the transformation of the world lies in their communion with God in Jesus Christ. They live as disciples of the One who welcomed the poor and the outcast, and who challenged

authorities who showed little regard for human dignity or the will of God. The church needs to help those without power in society to be heard; at times it must become a voice for those who are voiceless. Faith also impels them to work for a just social order, in which the goods of this earth may be shared equitably, the suffering of the poor eased and absolute destitution one day eliminated. The tremendous economic inequalities that plague the human family, such as those in our day that often differentiate the Global North from the Global South, need to be an abiding concern for all the churches."

There are my friends, so many issues that call for our attention as those who through vows in baptism are "close to Jesus." The one I want to lift up this New Year's Day is poverty.

In Canada poverty manifests itself in the increasing number of people who depend on food banks. In Ontario alone 375,000 people turn to food banks every month and more than a third of them are under the age of 18. In Canada the overall child poverty ratio is 13.5 per cent. Like you, I am not unfamiliar with these kind of statistics. It's when I come face to face with such a sad reality that I am deeply moved. I remember being at the [arish of St. John the Evangelist in London, Ont. in November. This is a parish like countless others across the church where a Saturday night dinner is provided for those who are homeless, working poor, or on social assistance that often runs out before the end of the month. I saw a mother coming through the line with her children. A chicken dinner was being offered and my job was to say "what kind of bread would you like with your dinner?" The very fact that there was a choice between white or whole wheat or multigrain bread was overwhelming to them. So also was the question, "Would you like butter for your vegetables?" I happily responded and confess that I gave them more than they asked for. Their eyes glistened with delight and off they went to find a table. About half an hour later I saw the same mother and her children back in the line for a second helping after everyone has enjoyed their first. As I offered them bread for a second time, I was mindful that this might be the most nutritious meal they have for the entire week -- freshly cooked and representing the balance in diet so many of us take for granted.

I am proud of the church that offers this kind of a meal in so many places across this country. I take this opportunity to thank every Anglican who is committed to this ministry. Truly it is offered in the spirit of Jesus' own compassion for the crowds. He said "If I send them away, they will surely faint on the way for they are hungry." (Matthew 15:32) May God continue to bless you in this good work to which you are so devoted.

Poverty in Canada is also manifested in the startling number of men and women and children who are homeless. That number is in the range of 400,000. This subject and that of affordable housing was a major theme of our Joint Assembly with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada here in Ottawa last year. The presentation, focussed on the many faces of homelessness — the youth, the elderly, the addicted, those suffering with mental illness, the unemployed and the working poor. It also drew our attention to the "hidden homeless". Those living in cars, substandard motels, and those couch-surfing with friends compassionate enough to take them in. It also revealed the sad truth that in the homeless population in this country, aboriginal youth are highly over-represented. As churches in Full Communion, the Anglican Church of Canada and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada declared:

"Our local churches are amongst those who are providing a broad range of services and support for these individuals and families. While our efforts help them day by day, we firmly believe that a comprehensive, collaborative, and coordinated initiative among all levels of government and stakeholders is required to address the underlying causes of homelessness and the alarming statistics concerning substandard housing; and that an effective and accountable implementation process is required to meet our obligation 'to respect, protect and fulfill the right to adequate housing', a motion passed unanimously in our Parliament in May, 2012.

My own hope is that this year will be a year of unprecedented advance in tackling issues associated with poverty. I pray there be many more initiatives like your Bishop's Appeal for Ending Child Poverty. I pray our faith, skill and passion for addressing these issues will be unleashed diocese by diocese across the country. I pray our voice can be co-ordinated, articulate, and effective in calling for measures that reverse the unacceptable trend of statistics on these matters.

I pray dear friends, that we be known as the church for the poor, that we be advocates for their cause and ambassadors for the justice which flows from the heart of God — a justice in which all have enough to live, — enough nutritious food, enough clean water, enough affordable housing and adequate health care, enough freedom to live in peace and without fear of violence in our streets.

"Be close to Jesus" said the Padre. That was his counsel to the Community of Sisters as they entered Advent and Christmas some years ago. May it be the counsel that guides the life and witness as our church in this New Year.

May we be close to Jesus...close enough to hear the beat of his heart...for us and for the world.

Amen.