

A Statement Reflecting the Visions and Conversations at Stronger Together

Sept 16, 2011 – Stronger Together 2011 was a consultation on regional, national youth ministries. The aim of these ministries is to better facilitate and enable youth ministry at the local level. Leaders from both the Anglican Church of Canada and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada gathered for this three-day consultation.

Young people are a prophetic voice our church needs desperately to hear and respond to. Are we willing to pay attention?

From September 13-16, 2011, a group of 24 Anglican and Lutheran diocesan, synodical and national youth ministry leaders from across Canada gathered at Camp Columbia on Thetis Island, British Columbia. We were also joined for some of our time by +James Cowan, Bishop of British Columbia and Bishop Probal Kanto Dutta of the Diocese of Durgapur in the Church of North India.

As Lutheran and Anglican leaders passionate about the integral ministry of young people within the church, we gathered for a time of spiritual renewal, to strengthen our relationships with one another, to equip ourselves for our specialized regional ministries, and to continue to vision and dream the future of youth ministry across the expansive geography of our land.

We come away from our time together energized, encouraged and ever more passionate about the ministry amongst youth to which we have been called by God. Youth ministry is our vocation. We are not party planners or Friday night baby sitters. When we get older we don't graduate to "real ministry." God has called us to equip the saints for ministry amongst young people, and we are responding to that call.

Ours is a God who calls us into mission for others, and ours is a church marked by mission. Together, Anglicans and Lutherans alike, we must intentionally invite young people to participate fully in God's mission alongside us. To do so will require no small amount of humility, partnership, resolve and vision.

We acknowledge that ours is a world in a time of great flux and rapid change. We need not fear. In such a time it is imperative that our ministry amongst young people not waver in its commitment, even as we experiment with new ways of sharing and living the gospel with the young people in our midst.

Together we shared numerous stories of ways in which youth ministry takes place in deep and meaningful ways without any form of youth group. We must explore a vast array of new ideas and opportunities to minister to youth. Youth Group is not the only model of youth ministry.

We must rediscover what it means to minister in our whole parish. Our ministries must not simply serve the people who enter our buildings, but ripple out into the

neighbourhoods and communities within our parish boundaries and beyond. If we fail to do so, we are falling short of God's call.

As a church we must free ourselves of the worry of self-preservation and free our churches of the fear of closure. It is not our job to preserve the institution for its own sake, or for the sake of young people who we hope will come after us. What we must do first and foremost in this time of rapid change is grow into God's call to love and serve the people God has put in our path.

We have come to understand, and need the entire church to know that our common ministry amongst youth must be fully integrated into the life of the church. This is not simply the ministry of the specialized few, but of the whole people of God. It is our ministry as the Baptized to all people.

As we took time together to look back over the last three years in youth ministry, we were excited to see how much we have been able to accomplish with such limited financial resources. Events such as the first joint National Youth Gathering (2010), National Youth Ministry Forums (2008 and 2011), Local initiatives, Diocesan and Synod events, vision and action around new staff hires, Justice Camps, Ask & Imagine, and the work of the Youth Initiatives Task Force and Working Group, among many others.

We have found new ways to minister as Anglicans and Lutherans within our individual denominational contexts, and we have found new ways to minister together. We have become stronger, together. We wonder what our ministry might look like with the commitment of long-term sustainable funding to help support our ministry.

Throughout our time at Stronger Together 2011, we believe that we have lived and worked together in the spirit of Full Communion. In the presence of Jesus, we have laughed and cried, inspired and been inspired, shared frustrations, fears, joys and excitements. We have broken bread together and listened deeply to the similarities and differences amongst our churches.

We began this week not knowing what we could learn from one another. We came to this place highly attuned to our individual and denominational contexts. But what we have found through working together is that we have so many experiences, visions, ideas and concerns that we all hold in common. Indeed, Bishop Probal commented as he listened to our discussions and stories that he could easily be in a meeting in his own Province of Northern India – the concerns, experiences and visions are so very similar.

We are convicted and convinced that the spirit of our communion binds our two churches, and binds us in the shared responsibility to respond to God's urgent call amongst young people, now.