

172nd Synod: May 25 - 27, 2014

The following Synod report was presented to the congregation of St. George's of Forest Hill at the 10am service on June 1, 2014. This presentation was followed by a second report in which John Ryrle shared his reflections of Synod. There is some duplication in our observations and each report refers to each other's.

Synod started on a warm and brilliant Sunday afternoon with brief housekeeping rules followed by a wonderful "Brazilian" feast on the Cathedral grounds. Music was supplied by a Latin band and there was laughter, dancing and fellowship. The meal was followed by a beautiful worship service in the Cathedral where the singing and praying was enhanced by the signing of the covenant between the Huron Diocese and the Diocese of Amazonia. Bishop Bob spoke of community; he spoke of the world wide Anglican Communion ... 83 million believers within 165 countries ... united in 'one' through baptism. Bishop Bob proclaimed that we were "joined with the people of Amazonia through Bishop Saulo, Ruth and Mary"¹. Sunday's events were a foreshadowing of what was to come over the next two days.

Theme

Our reading from Joshua (chapter 24: 14-28) brought the familiar verse "... but as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord". We were encouraged to focus on Christ and not be swayed by the Gods of our generation - the secular world of Power, Prestige and Possessions; we were encouraged to serve others (the poor, the hungry, the weak ...)

For me there were two significant themes for Synod:

- The Renew initiative (*how do we help the church fall in love again*)
- The new covenant with our Companion diocese (*How do we join together, care for, learn from and teach each other to love Christ in all people? How do we serve the poor, the weak and the victims of injustice?*)

We started both days with a bible study on the readings from Sunday evening. Both had two completely different styles and John will share more of that during his synod report.

Business

As you can imagine there is always business to discuss and much of both Monday and Tuesday was spent on "diocesan" business updates. What surprised me the most was the amount of Diocesan work that takes place behind the scenes and that many in the local parish are not aware of the good work done by the Diocese of Huron. Here is a sample of some of the reports:²

¹ References to: The Rt. Rev'd Saulo Mauricio de Barros (Bishop of Amazonia), his wife: Ms. Ruth de Barros and lay member: Ms. Mary White Rocha.

² This section was curtailed for the parish presentation.

- Report from Huron University College (*of interest was the Theological lay courses, encouraging non clergy to spiritual maturity*)
- Report from Huron Church Camp (*supporting our youth on their Christian journey*). We heard from former campers and how this camp had a significant impact on their lives. We heard of the need to continue this important ministry for current campers but also were reminded that the camp provides an invaluable training ground for the counselor-in-training program in order to develop strong future leaders of our parishes and our Anglican church. And we heard that the bathrooms are 'finally' being renovated 😊
- Report from the College of Deacons (*explaining the unique gifts that each deacon provides within the Diocese; our own Brother Mark being one of them*).
- Report from the Justice League of Huron (*explaining that through a myriad of actions we are all linked and should tear down our 'government' boundaries and strive for peace, justice and demonstrate the love of God*)
- Report on the Huron Hunger Fund / PWRDF
- Report from the Huron Church News (*explaining the cost of the publication, need for accurate mailing lists and the need for articles/stories from around the diocese. They also stressed the importance of the paper as it provides a link for all of the churches travelling together on our spiritual journey*)
- Report on Safe Church (*explaining new rules that are needed to protect our young and vulnerable and a new pamphlet that will be available on the Huron website soon*)
- Report on the Strategic Plan (*explaining our strategic direction and how the Renew priorities fit into this plan*)

However, throughout the business topics, we would be encouraged to stand up and Praise the Lord through song. One Song that was consistent throughout Synod was **"I've Decided to Make Jesus My Choice"**.³ The words may be familiar to some but the theme was consistent Through adversity we need to focus, choose Christ and make a conscious decision to serve our Lord every day.

Renew

Renew was discussed throughout our two days at Synod. We were reminded that 'Renew' is not a 'campaign' that lasts one year or three years. Renew is part of the church's strategic direction It is a journey for the entire diocese. Bishop Bob asked us to think of it as a "lifestyle" and to get up every morning and say 'yes to Jesus'. I learned about Renew throughout the Diocese through informal discussions with other church groups and was often amused by their question "so is your church doing this renew thing". I was very proud of the work St. George's has completed to date and would like to publically thank Nelson and Valerie Cuthbert and their group for their leadership during this most important, if not essential ministry.

We discussed all 6 elements of the Renew Strategy throughout the 2 days:

1. Our Parish Vitality ... *ensuring each parish has the resources to carry out God's mission for their future.*
2. Our camp life *The camp needs an infusion of money in order to offer campers an opportunity to experience God's abundance.*

³ Words to this hymn can be found on the last page.

3. Our empowered Leadership ... *ensuring the Bishops have discretionary funds (through the Bishops' Friends events) to support our clergy families in times of need as well as supporting lay and clergy training programs.*
4. Our Enduring Legacy ... *an investment fund used to fund future Diocesan or parish needs. The needs could be: training support, providing money for curacies or other parish ministries. Bishop Bob made a "shout out" remembering when St. George's wanted to build this new sanctuary; they took a loan from the Diocese.*
5. Our Commitment to Youth ... *There was significant emphasis on Youth and the new training program called 'Trail Blazing'. The concept is about more than making the church fun but rather to engage the youth in ministry. We have a long way to go but it is exciting to hear that we are all moving in the right direction. There were youth delegates in attendance at Synod. They had just spent the last 2 days with other diocesan youth (at least 6 from our own parish) at Huron Church camp and then journeyed to London on the Sunday afternoon. They came with their sleeping bags and backpacks and a passion to be heard. They were going to a CLAY (Canadian Lutheran Anglican Youth) conference in BC later in the summer and were raising money through their 'calendar campaign'. Each deanery was asked to donate towards CLAY and the Waterloo deanery completed their task first!! The extent of this process was a reduction of \$100 from each youth's travel expenses.*
6. Our Shared Ministries ... *supporting PWRDF (Primate World Relief and Development Fund), Huron Hunger fund, Huron Church News and our new companion diocese.*

During our Renew Panel discussions Bishop Bob and Bishop Terry responded to many questions, some of which are captured below:

- A. What are the challenges facing our diocese and how does this fall into the Renew framework?
 - They talked about secularism, how the church is not as relevant to society as it once was, that we don't have the critical mass we used to. "We can't be what we were and this cannot immobilize us. Our scripture tells us to move into this 'uncomfortable space' as a people of hope. It's OK to let go".
 - They reminded us that between 1500 and 1960 the popularity of the church moved up and down and pointed out that some models of the past may not serve us today. Bishop Terry asked us that before we worry and focus on money we need to:
 - i. Engage in a vision
 - ii. Engage in the needs of those around us
 - iii. Engage in critical thinking and conversation
 - iv. Look outside ourselves and be concerned about mission
- B. Is there any consideration getting together with other denominations?
 - There have been no formal considerations but some rural areas are sharing a paid clergy member or sharing a building. "We need to see all of us as a wider community in Christ".
- C. Further renew-al thoughts:
 - We need to prime our spiritual pump
 - Every day we need to remind ourselves " I choose Jesus"
 - God is speaking to us and we need to listen by:
 - i. Meeting together
 - ii. Studying scriptures
 - iii. Praying

- iv. Drawing young people in
- v. Testimonies
- vi. Checking in with other groups
- It is just the beginning but our commitment must be ongoing; parishes are craving spiritual leadership.
- From the words of Bishop Morse Robinson, “we need to live generously” And to date the Bishops: have met with clergy to learn what is in their hearts, have created the “15 minutes with God” Lenten study, have created a Renew Facebook page and have considerable Renew information on the Huron website. “They want to help the church to fall in love again”.

Amazonia – Our new companion diocese

John and I will share some interesting facts and issues facing our new companion diocese as well as their Christ focused vision:

- Their geographical distance is 3.5 million km squared (it is significantly larger than Huron) and is mainly an amazon forest with many areas only accessible by boat or plane.
- They have 9 churches including the Cathedral
- There are 5 stipend priests
- Some of their challenges include: poverty, illiteracy, violence against women and children and drugs in the urban areas and environmental concerns like deforestation and land right issues in the rural areas.
- The church is the voice of the poor with respect to inequality and social justice issues.
- They have some differences from Canada (illiteracy for example) but also some similarities (land rights of our First Nations people, deforestation and multinational companies’ overreaching power to name a few).
- They adhere to the idea of Inculturation: The Anglican church being part of the indigenous culture not taking over or trying to change that culture. The example they gave was from the Christmas story; they set the story in their cultural context and instead of a ‘white archangel’ there was an Indian angel in a colourful Brazilian dress with Parrot wings.

A highlight for me was witnessing our new covenant with the Diocese of Amazonia, hearing the words of Bishop Saulo, seeing the presentation of their work in their Diocese and being able to meet Bishop Saulo, his wife Ruth and their lay delegate Mary. They are so incredibly humble but their vision and path is clear. And as Ruth stated “We don’t walk with the poor We are the poor”.

Our Synod was brought to a close with remarks from Bishop Terry. He brought us back to the words from Joshua ... ‘we will serve the Lord’. He wants us to continue to walk with Jesus. It is not what we ‘can’ do but what we ‘must’ do. How do we transform our community and the world? How do we give Jesus our heart? And as we sang our last song, joining hands in prayer and praise The words that rang out were: “ I’ve decided to make Jesus my choice”.

*Respectfully submitted:
Lesley Burland Prong
June 1, 2014*

I've decided to make Jesus my choice

Verse 1:

Some folks would rather have houses and land,
some folks choose silver and gold,
these things they treasure and forget about their souls;
I've decided to make Jesus my choice.

Chorus:

The road is rough,
the going gets tough,
and the hills are hard to climb.
I started out a long time ago,
there's no doubt in my mind;
I have decided to make Jesus my choice.

Verse 2:

These clothes may be ragged that I'm wearing,
heavy is the load that I'm bearing,
these burdens that I'm carrying;
I've decided to make Jesus my choice

*Text & Music: Harris Johnson
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