

The Report of the Diocese of Montreal to Provincial Council – September 2004

(submitted by The Very Rev Michael J. Pitts and the Ven Peter Hannen, Commissaries sede vacante)

This is of necessity a short report: the see of the Diocese of Montreal became vacant upon the resignation of the Most Rev Andrew Hutchison on 31st July 2004 following his election as Primate of the Anglican Church of Canada.

It is hoped that an election of a successor Bishop will be accomplished on September 18th, for which date an Electoral Synod has been called. That being the case, a service of Consecration and enthronement has been planned for October 14th, to enable the new Bishop to preside at the Diocesan Synod on the following two days.

At the Diocesan Synod of 2003, a motion had been brought to amend the diocesan canon governing the election of a bishop to bring it into line with Provincial Canon 3. This motion, however, was defeated, and the present election is being conducted under the Diocesan Canon 1. This has not been to everyone's liking: there have been requests for fuller information about candidates, the production of a profile of the diocese, and a search process. All of these would have been included in the proposed canon, but in the light of its defeat, the chancellor has felt that the present rules can only be stretched to the extent of asking each nominated candidate to submit a 500 word statement on his or her vision of the episcopacy. It should also be noted that there is the possibility of nominating other candidates through a write-in during the balloting process.

In the relatively short interim period, the commissaries have undertaken only the tasks and decisions necessary to ensure the continued smooth running of the Diocese. They are thankful that this task has fallen to them during the summer months, when the work load is customarily light, both in the diocese and in the cathedral. The Episcopal Council, consisting of the Dean and Archdeacons, together with the diocesan Comptroller, has continued to meet both in full session and in subcommittees, to attempt to clarify some of the problem areas of the ministry of the diocese. The general feeling has been, however, that few of these problems can be solved outside a more general framework of objectives and sense of direction shared between the Parishes, the Synod, the administration and the Bishop. Much is therefore on hold until he or she will take the reins of the diocese.

The new Bishop will face, as does the whole church, the debate concerning sexuality and sexual orientation, together with the debate which lies behind it concerning the nature of the authority and interpretation of scripture. The debate in Montreal will get under way at the annual clergy conference, due to take place mid-way between the election and the consecration. The new bishop will also face more local issues. The Anglican Church in Montreal still needs to come to terms with its role in the new Quebec society, which is not only francophone, but also, as Michael Adams points out in *Fire and Ice (Penguin Canada 2003)* the most postmodern in its social values of all of Canada, and perhaps of North America. This role of church in society needs to be considered and shared with parishes, where, with some exceptions, the dominant group in the congregation is older, Anglo-Saxon, and therefore tending to be conservative in social outlook.

Another task in the new episcopacy will be to envision a structure for the administration and life of the diocese, which is consonant with the realities of the situation of the church. There are geographical areas of the diocese where it is clear that ministry through traditional parish structure will no longer be financially possible or pastorally desirable. There will be financial issues to deal with in the structure of the diocese and synod office, as well as in the parishes. While we do not believe that the diocese is in any imminent danger of collapse, hard work, tough decisions and facing and overcoming of resistance to change will be required to ensure the longer term stability and growth in ministry of the church in this place. At least in this last respect some movement has taken place. With the concurrence of the parishes involved, three churches have been sold in the last few months, and a major downtown parish is seriously contemplating the integrating of all parish activities into the present liturgical space.