

As I write this report, our diocesan office is busy with the activities of September – seems schools are not the only institution revving up to go at this time of year! The time between our two gatherings – last year’s Provincial Synod and this Council – has been quite hectic for our diocese. Ever since the election of our previous bishop to the primacy in June of 2004, the synod office has been going through many transitions; what with a new bishop, a new Executive Officer, a new Comptroller, an interim assistant archivist, and a new synod office secretary, all within some 36 months. I am extremely grateful to our diocesan staff that, in these difficult times of transition and changes, pulled together, taking on added responsibilities and at crucial times, sharing in extra duties.

The 147th Session of the Synod of the Diocese of Montreal was held in late September. Every three years, we hold what we call a Conference Synod; that is to say that, in addition to gathering for the business session of Synod, we also meet to hear and discuss topics of interest for the diocese. The topic for this Conference Synod was the Blessing of Same-Sex Unions. Anglicans in North America and across the world have been struggling in recent decades with the question of how to be faithful to God in the light of both Scripture and the growing awareness that many people — including faithful Anglicans — experience themselves as homosexual by birth or by “creation”. The on-going debate on this question exploded onto the headlines of the world when the diocese of New Westminster voted to begin blessing civil unions of gay and lesbian couples in 2002 and, the following year the diocese of New Hampshire elected Canon Gene Robinson, a person in a public homosexual relationship, as their bishop. Some of the world’s Anglicans were angered by this election, while many others rejoiced at this as audacious faithfulness to God’s call.

What to do? What is the Spirit saying to the Church? What are the underlying issues from Scripture, Theology, Culture, Civil and Canon Law, Science and a Pastoral point of view? During the Conference Synod we devoted significant time to listening to one another about these important issues. Presentations were made by faithful people, both clergy and lay, with expertise in these areas, and all participants were encouraged to share their reflections in small discussion groups. This was not a decision-making process and no motions on these issues were brought to Synod. On two consecutive evenings, members of Synod and other people of the diocese were able to listen to competent speakers, speaking on the subjects of “Scripture and Theology”, “Science”, “History, Tradition and Culture” and “Legal and Canonical Issues” as they relate to the Blessing of Same-Sex Unions. The business sessions of synod went without much controversy and three motions regarding Church property, division of funds upon the dividing of a corporation, and socially-responsible investments were dealt with and approved. For more on our diocesan synod and the talks on same-sex blessings, I encourage you to consult our archived diocesan newspaper (November 2006 edition) available online at www.montreal.anglican.ca

Within the context of our on-going Strategic Planning initiative, we were fortunate to welcome as Keynote Speaker, Archbishop Douglas W. Hambidge, retired Archbishop of British Columbia and the Yukon, along with Archdeacon Michael Pollesel, General Secretary, Anglican Church of Canada, and Archdeacon John M. Robertson, National Gift Planning Officer, Anglican Church of Canada, for a conference on the theme of “From Scarcity to Abundance – From Reflection to

Action". Archbishop Hambidge, in his opening remarks, reflected that stewardship is not a comfortable topic for Anglicans and that a conference such as this one is welcomed. A first step on the road to stewardship, he says, is to recognize that nothing we have is ultimately ours. To further illustrate this he referred to the Gospel account of the parable of the talents. Attended by some 50 clergy and lay people of the diocese, the conference was deemed a success.

In January of this year, I was privileged, along with 23 other bishops from the Anglican Communion (among them Bishop Derek Hoskin of Calgary, Bishop Gregory Kerr-Wilson of Qu'Appelle and Bishop David Torraville of Central Newfoundland) to attend the New Bishops' Course at the International Study Centre in Canterbury. Bishops came from Burundi, Jamaica, Madagascar, Papua New Guinea, Tanzania, Nigeria, Canada and the Congo to name but a few. We met daily for Morning Prayer, Eucharist, Bible Study, and Choral Evensong sung by Choir of Canterbury Cathedral. We shared in discussions around the themes of ministry and mission in our own contexts, the Bishop as leader in mission, the Bishop as administrator. The value of our fellowship and discussions as bishops was our willingness to listen and learn from one another. We had a candlelight pilgrimage through Canterbury Cathedral led by the Dean of Canterbury. We stopped at difference places and chapels and the Dean shared some of the history of the place and we all prayed together. It was quite moving to engage in Bible Studies with others; we studied the stories in Luke's Gospel, his suffering, his death and resurrection. Mid-week we travelled to London and met the staff of the Anglican Communion Office; a small staff which accomplishes significant work for the Anglican Communion. In the afternoon, we went to Lambeth Palace where the Archbishop of Canterbury resides with his family. We had a tour of the Palace and then had tea with Archbishop Rowan Williams who addressed us with words of encouragement and support in our episcopal ministry.

The Diocese was fortunate in being able to count on the services of Canon Tim Elliott of the Diocese of Toronto. Canon Elliott has made several trips to our diocese to meet, listen and speak with members of diocesan clergy, in session that we have called "vocational conversations", to help them deal with the challenges and pressures of their vocation. We also had the good fortune to host the Revd Christine Benoit from the Diocese of the Seychelles. Christine became the first women priest ordained in the Seychelles and she spent three months with us – staying with the Sisters of St John the Divine and doing an "internship" with the Revd Jody Medicoff at the church of St Barnabas, St-Lambert.

In December, again as part of the Strategic Planning initiative, we held a day-long workshop led by our facilitator, Dr Peter Richardson of Queen's University. Out of this meeting came the proposal for a day-long workshop on Human Resources as well as a diocesan festival around Pentecost called "Live the Spirit".

For our HR workshop, we called upon the Revd Canon Janet Griffith Johnson, Director of Human Resources for the Diocese of Huron. With about 40-odd participants, from Territorial Archdeacons to parish corporations members, with some diocesan staff members in attendance, Canon Johnson talked about her experiences in her own diocese and proceeded to try and highlight the HR needs in the Diocese of Montreal as well as suggestions for structures to improve services for the care of employees. The plenary session also broke out into smaller groups for brainstorming on the question: "What are the needs in this diocese in regards to supporting and developing clergy for effective ministry?" The feedback from this session was lengthy, varied and enthusiastic. Some items: care of clergy rated many related responses, i.e. employment length, clergy insecurity, need of leadership training, realistic expectations of clergy-wellness needs, orientation for new clergy, support networks such as clergy mentoring; Needs for greater communication of information, i.e. Episcopal Council notes, general news of

clergy colleagues; Training for lay leadership, policies needed; Need for HR for diocese with clear understanding of rules and expectations for everyone. It was all in all a very interesting and fruitful day.

On Pentecost weekend, the diocese organised a festival called "Live the Spirit"; on the Saturday, the committee organised "The Amazing (G)race" – based on the reality TV show of the same name but going from church to church instead of countries. Funds raised from this activity went to our diocesan PWRDF chapter. In the evening, there was an opportunity for the diocese to enjoy some fun time together at the Diocesan Party, complete with DJ, a bar, and light snacks. Finally, on Sunday to close the weekend, there was a Sunday afternoon Praise and Proclamation service held in Christ Church Cathedral. This special Evensong attracted some 140 worshippers. The preacher was the Revd Donald Butler, incumbent of the Church of the Nativity, Scarborough. Our thanks to all who worked hard to make that weekend the success it was.

Our Montreal chapter of the PWRDF has also been quite busy over the last 12 months organising day-long talks on subjects as varied as mining (When Canadian mining companies work in developing countries, do Canadian values work there too?), The Church in the World – PWRDF and Partners with Rob Shropshire, Equitas; Brian MacDonough, Archdiocese of Montreal, and Glynis Williams, Action Réfugiés as well as welcoming former Primate Michael Peers at their annual meeting. More recently, they hosted a concert by the African Children's Choir, presented the photo exhibit Facing AIDS, Facing Reality and the Ribbon of Hope, and welcomed the Three Cantors for their first concert in Montreal.

In the 1970s, the Diocese of Montreal could claim some 100,000 communicants in 140 churches. Today, with those numbers down to less than 14,000 members in 120 congregations we have to face the fact that we are in a constant struggle between dwindling resources and maintaining ministry. Parish amalgamation or closure, multipoint parishes, more frequent interims, aided parishes or pastoral communities are all topics that have been placed on the front burner of our diocesan administration.