



**Diocese of New Westminster 116th Synod – May 22 and 23, 2015**  
 Italian Cultural Centre, Vancouver

## People need community; Anglicans can provide it

**People**, especially in the Vancouver area, are longing for community, the Diocesan Synod was told, and Anglican parishes are a place where this longing can be fulfilled.

Some 300 delegates to the 116th Diocesan Synod wrestled with the theme of the meeting—“(be)longing”—and how their parishes could serve the needs of both those who now go to church, as well as others who live in parish neighbourhoods.

The theme had three parts which Synod members considered in table groups: “(be)longing” as it applied to community, to the search for God, and what particular ways Anglicans can work to satisfy the desire people have for both community and God.

“Finding a new church is hard when you’re new to a community,” said the Rev. Expedito Farinas of St. Mary’s, South Hill, drawing on his own experience. “It’s really hard to connect.”

“Community, a place to belong that is made up of people we would never have met otherwise, where you are accepted for who you are, is one of the



important things that our parishes offer,” Delegate Anika Robertson of St. Timothy’s told Synod.

Synod’s deliberations were assisted by three videos prepared by Diocesan communications (soon available on the Diocesan website). In the videos many New Westminster Anglicans appeared, from youth to a retired bishop, speaking from their experience about the longing for community.

The Rev. Matthew Johnson, who works as a street priest in the Downtown East Side, in the video said that just listening to people in that community is one of the most important things he does.

“People are struggling and they want to speak to someone who is going to listen... People are longing for contact, for relationship, and they are longing for spirituality.”

Andrew Stephens-Rennie, who is with an outreach mission, St. Brigid’s, housed at St. George’s in Vancouver, in the video says that what is important in building community happens all week long, not just on Sunday: “It’s not just where we show up one day a week, it’s how we live our lives together...”



*New Westminster Anglicans (clockwise from upper left): Paul Clark, Lucy Price, Jim Cruickshank, Andrew Stephens-Rennie, and Matthew Johnson spoke of (be)longing in the video.*

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## Delegates agree that a study of Diocesan resources including parish assessments will go to 2017 Synod

The issue of Diocesan parish assessments — how much money parishes must set aside and send to the Diocese for its functions — will be opened up during the 2017 Synod.

Synod voted to ask Bishop Melissa Skelton to appoint a task force to study diocesan finances and report back in two years, and in the meantime issue an interim report to Diocesan Council.

The motion followed a joint presentation on Diocesan finances by Bishop Melissa Skelton and Treasurer Bob Hardy.

The Bishop said she had been trying to get a handle on the finances since she was elected two years ago – a “30,000 foot view” to find out what the resources of the Diocese really are.

She has talked to many other bishops in Canada and found that, compared to other Canadian dioceses New Westminster, is blessed with rich resources: human, financial, and real estate. The Diocese is among the five best off.

Treasurer Hardy said Diocese has \$20 million in its Consolidated Trust Fund plus five sites no longer being used by parishes. In addition, parishes together hold investments and cash of nearly \$34 million, he said. Some of these funds are restricted in their use of capital or income, but many are not.

As for operating income and expenses, currently the Diocese’s \$3.1 million budget is balanced, said Hardy. However this is only possible because in 2015 the Diocese is drawing down about \$155,700 from surpluses in previous years. Once the surpluses are used up, other sources of



*Treasurer Bob Hardy and Bishop Melissa Skelton talk finances (Randy Murray photo)*

income must be found or expenditures cut.

Parishes are assessed from 15.5% to 19.36% of their income, depending on their size, with larger parishes assessed more. These assessments fund about 67% of the diocesan operating budget. The remaining third comes from investments and other revenues.

Hardy warned that reducing the assessment rate could have the effect of reducing assistance to less affluent parishes because it would reduce funds available to help them. The current formula subsidizes small parishes.

In the future, we want to develop “vital, attractive, and sustainable parishes,” said the Bishop. At a table exercise, Synod delegates were asked for input regarding the current assessment formula and to make recommendations for change.

*All of our resources are meant “to grow communities of faith in Jesus Christ to serve God’s Mission in the World”*

## Many Anglicans want to serve the Diocese

Many delegates and others appeared eager to serve in elected positions at the 116th Diocesan Synod.

Contested elections took place in about half the elected positions, more than at many synods, where positions in prior years often have been filled by acclamation. Returning officers had to recruit extra help to count the ballots.

Desired by many were the eleven delegate spots (five clergy, five lay, and one youth) that the Diocese is allotted at the national General Synod, the governing body of the Anglican Church of Canada, which will be held in Toronto in 2016.

The election results are as follows.

**General Synod Delegates** – Rob Dickson, Melanie Delva, Jane Osler, Glen Mitchell, Cameron Gutjahr, Abby Cline (youth delegate); the Ven. David Fenton, the Rev. Brian Vickers, the Rev. Heidi Brear, the Very Rev. Peter Elliott, the Ven. Lynne McNaughton

**Diocesan Council Representatives** –

**Burrard Archdeaconry**; Mark Munn, the Rev. Expedito Farinas\*

**Capilano Archdeaconry**: Ian Thomas\*, the Rev. Janice Lowell\*

**Lougheed Archdeaconry**: Maureen Simons\*, the Rev. Paul Bowie\*

**Fraser Archdeaconry**: Joan Cope\*, the Rev. Louie Engnan\*

**Vancouver Archdeaconry**: – Carol Simpson, the Rev. Richard Leggett

**Westminster Archdeaconry**: Maureen Thompson\*, the Rev. Steve Thompson\*

**Youth Representatives** – Kimberly Blair, Christopher Sims

**Treasurer** – Bob Hardy\*

**Secretaries** – Kim Hodge\*, the Rev. Howie Adan\*

**Board of Discipline** – Margaret Briscall\*, Janet Hill\*, Andrew Stephens–Rennie\*; the Ven. John Stephens, the Rev. Sharon Salomons, the Rev. David Price

**Anglican Initiatives Fund Representatives** – Margaret Briscall, the Rev. Stephanie Shepard

**Bishop’s Advisory Committee on Appointments** – Susan McGee, Eric Harris, the Rev. Michael McGee, the Rev. Neil Gray

**Provincial Synod Representatives** – Mary McIntyre, Caitlin Reilley Beck; the Rev. Jessica Schaap, the Rev. Ruth Monette.

An asterisk \* indicates election by acclamation.

The Diocesan Council Representatives will have an important role over the next two years because, due to a decision made last year, Diocesan Synod will not be meet again (barring a special call by the Bishop) until 2017. In the interim, Diocesan Council functions a “synod between synods,” with most of the power that a synod has.



*The 116th Synod of the Diocese of New Westminster in session. It will meet again as a synod in 2017.*

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how we care for each other.”

Paul Clark of St. Catherine’s spoke of organizing a neighbourhood pub night in his home and inviting all who wanted to come. About 100 people showed up. He remembered one man who thanked him for organizing the gathering as he left. “He said it had been the first time he had been out socially in 25 years—that gave me shivers.”

“Belonging is a lost art,” suggested the video. “It’s not just that we’ve chosen not to belong—it’s that we’ve forgotten how.”

In the second video members of the Diocese expressed the belief that the longing for community is also a longing for God. “They are seeking an encounter with the Divine,” said Johnson.

“They have something that they need that they can’t fulfill,” said Lucy Price, an artist and

postulant for the priesthood, now at St. James. “They may be longing for a big house, a car, they’re longing to get married. Then they reach about age 35 and ask: Why don’t I feel better?”

Hassan Jetha of St. Stephen’s in Burnaby put it this way: “Once you immerse yourself into God and understanding God, you end up feeling at one with God and have a longing for God.”

Bishop Jim Cruickshank said that people have different starting points. Some seek to “get ahold of themselves” and find personal meaning; others have a deep need for community, a need “to belong to something.”

## In Other Actions, the Synod...

- Affirmed Christian values inherent in the concept of a “living wage” and agreed to explore how parishes might become living wage employers. Delegate Geri Grigg of St. John, Port Moody, told Synod that the current living wage in Metro Vancouver has been calculated at \$20.63 per hour.

- Agreed that the “care+share” appeal will help fund St. Paul’s homeless outreach program and the community support ministry collaboration project at St. Augustine, Marpole, and St. Faith, Vancouver, in 2016 through 2018.

- Heard that Christ Church Cathedral has raised \$5.6 million of the \$7.5 million required for its capital campaign to repair its roof, renovate its kitchen, and build a four-bell tower. Dean Peter Elliott said the bells have been cast and roof construction is currently underway.

- Agreed to ask the national church’s General Synod to add Oscar Romero, Roman Catholic

Archbishop of El Salvador, to the calendar of the Church Year of the Anglican Church of Canada, remembering him as a martyr each March 24, the date he was gunned down in church in 1980 while celebrating Mass.

- Resolved to send a message to Bishop David Lai and his Diocese of Taiwan to thank them for their 15 year partnership with the Diocese of New Westminster and assure them they will be held in prayer as the companion diocese agreement with Taiwan concludes. A working group is to explore a new companion diocese agreement.

- Heard from several First Nations members of Synod that although the work of the federal Truth and Reconciliation Commission will soon end with a closing event in Ottawa May 31 though June 3, the need for reconciliation continues, as does injury suffered by residential school survivors. Delegates in table groups considered actions they might take in their parishes.

## From the Bishop's Synod Sermon

“Do you love me?” The question of who and what we love becomes the engine of our lives as we navigate the wonders and perils of our youth, as we find our way through young adulthood and not so young adulthood and as, much to our surprise, we turn into elders who are still in the process of figuring out who and what we are drawn to, who and what we will embrace in our lives.

“Do you love me?” our spouses, partners, family members and friends ask us.

“Do you love me?” our jobs and vocations whisper to us.

“Do you love me?” our churches and civic groups seem to ask.

And just as when Jesus repeatedly asks Peter this very question in our Gospel [John 21: 15–19], when we are asked this question by people, by our vocations, by our churches and by other groups, what’s being asked of us is not whether we have warm, fluttery feelings about these people or things. No, what’s being asked of us is whether we will give ourselves to someone or to something—whether we will give it all: heart, mind, and actions.

Jesus is asking Peter “Do you love me?”

“Yes” Peter tells him. “Then feed my sheep” Jesus says.

And so here you and I are at our 2015 Synod being asked the same question, being asked whether we are willing to give ourselves to the people that Jesus calls his “sheep,” whether we are willing to feed them with the food we ourselves have already been given to offer them. Will we give it all, not only to the people already within our parish’s orbit but also to the ones beyond our parishes, those who might be looking for who we are and for the food we have?



*At the Synod Eucharist (photo by Randy Murray)*

And just as Jesus asked his question of Peter three times, today and tomorrow morning you and I will be exploring three different ways we can feed the people God has given us to feed. First, feeding people by offering them community; second, feeding people by offering them an experience of God and, finally, feeding people by offering them a way of living the Christian life that is distinctively Anglican.

And so let me say something about each of these.

About offering people community in our parishes—will we, can we, wake up to the fact that we have the gift of community to offer those in this region who are socially isolated, far from home, or longing for a sense of connection? For we have experience gathering different kinds of people, different ages, different ethnicities, different countries of origin, different religious backgrounds, different family configurations, all under one roof. We have experience helping people cultivate friendships over time, over meals and over conversation. We have experience being parishes that simply allow a person a place to belong even before they’re sure what and how they believe.

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About offering people an experience of God in our parishes—will we, can we, wake up to the fact that we must shape our parishes so that they both entice and satisfy the longing that people naturally have for God? For our God yearns to be a palpable presence at the center of the lives of each and every one of our parishes—God who is both beyond our understanding and standing right beside us, or standing on the beach before us in our own flesh. God who brings new life out of shattered expectations and then does it again and again. God whose language is prayer and whose idea of beauty is justice. God who chose us first, who loved us first, who poured out his life for us first.

And finally about offering people a distinctive and compelling Anglican identity in our parishes—will we, can we, wake up to the fact that particularity is always better than being generic, that heritage is a gift to be opened and shared in the present moment, that who we are in our identity can be trusted today more than ever before? For we have beauty and mystery to offer as food. We have open-mindedness and tolerance. We have liturgy and literature. We have the Bible and baptismal identity. We have reason and the rhythm of daily prayer. And these are only a small selection of who and what we are!

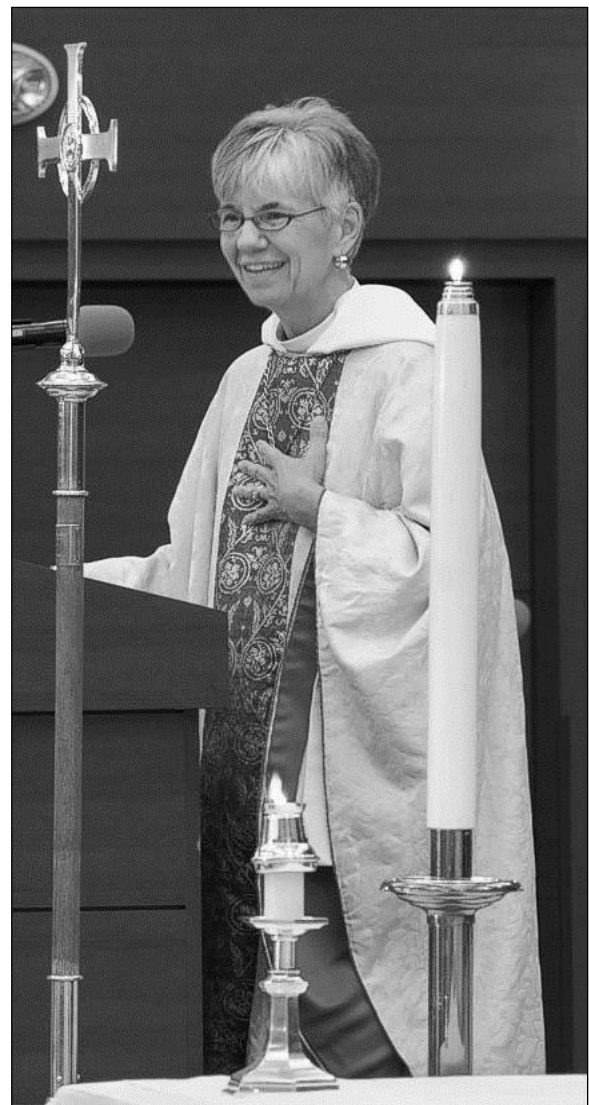
These three things—community, an experience of God, our distinctive and compelling Anglican heritage—these are the three ways we have been given to feed the people of God.

When I go on parish visitations here in the Diocese, I'm often asked what the difference is between parishes in Canada and the parishes I used to work with in the US. After some rather obvious comments—that parishes in Canada serve sweet pickles and parishes in the US don't, that parishes in Canada have a picture of the Queen in their halls and parishes in the US have no pictures of rulers or political figures of any kind anywhere on their property, after all these

comments, I get down to the truth: in my experience people in Canada love their parishes with a love I have never seen before. People in this Diocese love their parishes with a love I have never seen before.

"Do you love me?" Jesus asks Peter and us today... The Lord of Love, the Lord of the abundant catch waits for our answer. The Lord of Love, the Lord of the abundant catch waits for your answer.

*For space reasons, the Bishop's sermon has been abridged. Go to the Diocesan Website at [www.vancouver.anglican.ca](http://www.vancouver.anglican.ca) for the complete text.*



*Bishop Melissa Skelton (photo by Wayne Chose)*