

Visit to the Diocese of Qu'Appelle - Mark and Gill Ireland – June 2015

A wonderful experience

Visiting the diocese has been a huge privilege, and the highlight of my sabbatical. Although invited by Bishop Rob to share something of my experience of making new disciples and of mission action planning, I have come back, as so often with trips overseas, having received and learnt far more than I was able to give. In a sabbatical that has been shaped around 'writing – resting – learning – praying', the fortnight in Qu'Appelle was very much a time of learning, though I was able to share a little of the fruit of my recent writing. Gill was also able to share some of her experience from Mothers' Union with the leaders of Anglican Women in the diocese. The generous hospitality we received from everyone we met was deeply touching, and we hope very much to keep in touch with some of the friends we have made. Adding a week at the end to visit the Rockies (at the suggestion of the director of world mission, who arranged the visit) was a delightful and invigorating bit of Sabbath rest.

What we did

Arriving in Regina airport we were met by Bishop Rob and Archdeacon Dell. We stayed with Rob and Lorraine in their lovely home for three nights, meeting diocesan staff, visiting Saskatchewan museum (so helpful for understanding the geography of Saskatchewan and the culture of the First Nations peoples) and learning so much from the insights of Rob and Lorraine. It was a joy also to spend an evening with Dell and Susan Bornowsky in their new home, and an evening with Catherine Harper and Debbie, who had stayed with us in Walsall ten years ago; Catherine is the new director of training for the diocese, as well as part-time priest at the cathedral.

All this was good preparation for our journey to Watrous for the Provincial Synod of the Province of Rupert's Land, comprising ten dioceses which cover all of the Prairies and the Arctic. The Synod began with the election (by a clear margin) of Bishop Greg Kerr-Wilson, former bishop of Qu'Appelle and now bishop of Calgary, as Archbishop of the Province. Most of the legislative functions of the provincial synod have now been taken over by the Canadian General Synod, which means that there is more time for prayer, learning and fellowship (more akin to an English diocesan conference) – though they did spend a lot of time voting for prolocutors and committees. Highlights of the Synod included:

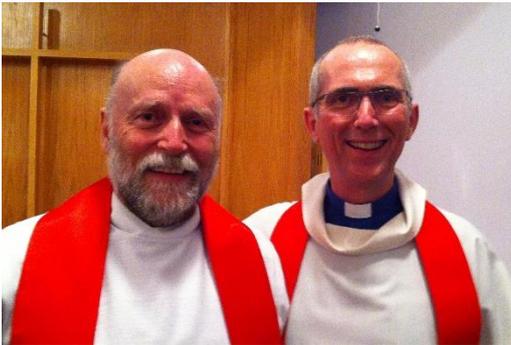


- input from Bishop Mark, the First National Indigenous Bishop, speaking about the 'Five Marks of Mission' (which originated in Canada) and leading a Gospel Jamboree in Aboriginal style.
- the chance to meet so many First Nations leaders and their bishops
- sharing a small group with retired archbishop Tom Morgan (whose very thoughtful sermon on humility opened the Synod)
- time with Bishop David of the Arctic and his wife Rita – he is looking to recruit English clergy to serve in the Arctic, and to help with theological education in a growing diocese with a chronic shortage of clergy.



After the Synod we went to stay with Barb and Ed Cameron in their beautiful and welcoming home. Barb is English and teaches ballet, married to Ed, a Canadian retired university lecturer. Barb and Ed showed us some of the sights, including the Art Gallery and the local theatre, where we saw an excellent show, performed in the round.

Whilst we were in Regina I had the privilege of leading a study morning for the diocesan clergy, and also preaching at the Induction of Dell Bornowsky as Rector of St. Philip's (part-time, in addition to his executive archdeacon role).



The next day Dell took us to meet the gifted staff team at the lively parish of Moose Jaw, where Dell had overseen the renovation and remodelling of the church and hall whilst training for ordination. We had lunch with rector Dean, who has a Ph.D in New Testament from Durham, self-supporting deacon Arlene, children's worker Helen and ordinand Nate, who is working on a Ph.D in John Donne's use of the Old Testament. (Ordinands have to pay the cost of their training.) Dean made the interesting comment that he is rubbish at strategy, but good at spotting people's gifts and working out ways to use them.

We then had two very special nights at Maple Creek, a parish 384 km from Regina, staying with Dale and Sally Chant in their cabin in the Cypress Hills. The rector, Peter Boote, comes from Stafford and had attended a retreat I had led years ago at Badger House in Lichfield diocese. He had asked me to pray with him about whether to join a diocesan visit to Qu'Appelle, out of which came a calling to Canada, to marriage and to ordination. His first words to me were, 'So it's all down to you that I am here!' Peter is doing a remarkable job of developing a clear mission strategy for the parish, and also caring for his wife Mary Ann in the latter stages of motor neurone disease. We took part in a 'Toonie Breakfast', named after the two-dollar coin, which the parish puts on every two weeks for the community. Eric, a local rancher, gave us an extensive tour of his ranch that afternoon. Maple Creek is a small town with a lot of churches of different denominations, including a 'Cowboy Church' for the cowboys on the local ranches – sounds like a really interesting fresh expression of church.



Back in Regina, Diocesan Council fell on the same day as the funeral of the late Duncan Wallace, former bishop of the diocese. At a shortened Council meeting I reflected on what we had learnt on our visit, whilst Gill met with Sandra Hill and Edith Maddaford, diocesan leaders of Anglican Church Women (ACW). Then on our final Sunday morning we attended St. Matthew's church, Regina, a large cathedral-like building with structural problems, which the vestry had voted to close last year; however Mae Boa, a remarkable lay person with faith and vision, persuaded the congregational meeting to keep open. This prompted a split with some leaving, but the remaining congregation have rallied round remarkably, and one year on there are clear signs of new life and numerical growth.

What we learned

Mission Action Planning done prayerfully and well can be a powerful agent for turnaround and change. The diocesan MAP is a model of what can be achieved at the centre to change the culture – scripturally based, mission focused, carefully costed, budgeted for and followed through with clearly owned and 'smart'

objectives. Of course at parish level the adoption of MAP is still patchy, but the clarity and effectiveness of the diocesan MAP is giving parishes a model and inspiration. In conversations with clergy we were heartened by many stories of creativity in evangelism – Messy Church in Whitewood, adult confirmations in St. Mary’s Regina, the church plant in Pense. Parishes are being challenged to raise money to give away through ‘Living the Mission’.

Prayer changes things. I learnt a lot from talking to Bishop Rob and seeing the practical prayerfulness with which he approaches each difficult issue. The diocesan MAP was born out of a week-long fast at St. Michael’s Retreat, part of his annual discipline. In my next book on MAP, this focus on ‘prayer and desire’ before starting the MAP process is something I want to incorporate. His starting point when meeting with the leaders of St. Matthew’s Regina after the aborted closure was to ask each of them to commit to pray for half an hour a day for the parish on a rota, and asked to be the first one on the rota each day. The diocesan clergy day also included a significant time for the clergy to pray for each other.



The treatment of First Nations in Canadian history, particularly over land and schools, is a chapter in Britain’s colonial history which we are appallingly ignorant about in the UK, and leaves a painful and lasting legacy. This year the report of Canada’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission was published, which used the words ‘cultural genocide’ to describe the policy under which the residential schools were set up. While we were in Regina the cathedral bells rang weekly 1172 times, in memory of Aboriginal women murdered and missing in the last 30 years, and while we were at Synod news broke that yet another Aboriginal woman had been murdered.



The Anglican Church in Canada has much to share with the rest of the Anglican Communion, particularly in the area of reconciliation. We were moved by the courageous work of Bishop Mark as First Indigenous Bishop, as a bridge and interpreter between First Nations and Caucasian clergy and congregations, and in raising up indigenous leadership, dioceses and bishops, and helping to heal the legacy of hurt caused by the Church’s involvement in the residential schools for Aboriginal children. (Government policy used to force children from First Nations to leave their families and be educated far away in English medium, so that they were distanced from the language and culture of their parents. This led to the break up of families and huge social problems. Some of these schools were actually run by the Church.) I also learned a lot from Paul Feheley, executive officer to the Primate, about how the Church in Canada is working to hold together radically different views over issues of human sexuality – experience that could be helpful and relevant for the Church of England in coming months.

Qu’Appelle diocese really cares for its clergy. The long distances to travel, isolation and extremes of climate all take their toll. In response to a number of cases of clergy burnout, the diocese has introduced a package of measures, which include giving clergy two days off a week, six weeks annual leave plus two weeks study leave annually, and asking them not to work more than three evenings a week. These measures, along with sense of moving from decline to growth, seem to be having a very positive effect on morale in the diocese.

What we shared

Provincial Synod – I gave a 35 min powerpoint presentation on ‘Discipleship: the longer journey’, based on the story of the rich young ruler, developing themes from my new book, ‘Making New Disciples’ (SPCK, 2015). This provoked a lively question time and very good response. I left the ppt for the provincial website, on request – see <http://www.rupertsprov.ca/>

Diocesan Clergy Day – I did a similar presentation, which though more polished, had a more sluggish response. (Not sure why.)

Induction of Dell Bornowsky – I preached on the readings for the Eve of St. John the Baptist (the diocese likes to follow the lectionary) on the theme of priesthood as being like John the Baptist, who preached repentance, who prophesied truth to power, and who pointed away from himself to Jesus.

Maple Creek – Gill and I talked with Peter and Sally about how one might introduce a prayer and/or spiritual ‘thought’ to the Toonie Breakfast. I also led an evening Bible study on Philip the Evangelist, which I began by inviting each person present to tell us about one person who had helped them on their faith journey. All contributed comfortably, and afterwards I had a long chat with Eric the rancher. Gill spent some time with Sally talking about prayer and Bible reading and sharing ideas for their local ACW branch.

Diocesan Council – I shared my reflections on what I had seen in the diocese under the headings of Turnaround through Prayer, Experience in Reconciliation, and Energy in Evangelism.

Anglican Church Women – Gill shared about Mothers Union in our parish, in our diocese and its national and international work. There is Mothers Union in the Province of Canada, which is one of the four provinces in the country, as well as small pockets in British Columbia. Sandra and Edith were very impressed with what MU is doing, and there could be scope for ACW to be affiliated with MU. Gill hopes to contact Mary Sumner House (HQ of Mothers Union) about this in the near future. Gill also told them about MU’s involvement in ‘Sixteen

Days of Activism Against Gender-based Violence’, an annual initiative which felt as if it might be very relevant in the light of the acute issue of ongoing violence against Aboriginal women.

St. Matthew’s Regina – I addressed the congregation over coffee after the service, and told the story of two daunting building problems I had faced in my two parishes, and how we raised the money we needed in each case through a Day of Prayer.

Books – I was able to leave copies of my books on evangelism and mission action planning for Catherine’s diocesan resources library, and scatter a few around at Synod.



Postscript: St. George among the Pines, Banff.

On our last Sunday in Canada we attended St. George among the Pines, in Banff, where the service was led by the new rector Howard Thornton, originally from the diocese of Qu’Appelle. Howard has some exciting plans for the parish, including using the vacant rectory to house a community of young adults, inspired by the new Community of St. Anselm at Lambeth Palace. We found ourselves sitting just behind the Revd Brett Cane, who happens to have tutored Rich Clarkson, an ordinand from All Saints, while he was teaching NT at Trinity College, Bristol. Brett has now retired to Canada, and wanted us to pass on greetings to Rich and Lucie.

Mark and Gill Ireland

17 July 2015