

The Right Reverend Patrick White  
Assisting Bishop for Trent-Durham



The Incorporated Synod  
of the Diocese of Toronto

965 Dundas Street West, Suite 207  
Whitby, ON L1P 1G8

Telephone: 905-668-1558  
Fax: 905-668-8216

trentdurhambishop@toronto.anglican.ca  
www.toronto.anglican.ca

## **A Pastoral Letter to the Clergy and People of All Saints, Christ Evangelical Lutheran, St Barnabas, St John, & St Luke, all of Peterborough, October 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2016**

To My Sisters and Brothers in Christ in Peterborough  
Greetings in the name of God, our Creator Redeemer and Sanctifier.

Last Saturday morning, the 24<sup>th</sup> of September I attended an event, which was part of your shared determination to move *together* towards a common future in your city.

When Bishop Linda Nicholls brought you together to consider how you might make better use of your resources, both human and material, in fulfilling God's mission in your community, she challenged you to be bold. And so, now having taken up that challenge you have narrowed down the ways you can best pool your resources and focus your mission for the future. And now a choice lies before you.

Saturday's gathering was an opportunity to reflect on how far you have come, what you truly value and must retain in the future, what you can leave behind, and what the next step or steps must be.

What Saturday revealed is that it is all a bit nerve-wracking at this point. Some people are quite impatient to just get on with it. Others are not so sure you are ready, are not so sure they like any of the options that have been offered. Feelings were running high.

At one point in the morning there was a call for prayer, for a time to be silent and wait upon the Spirit's leading. Some of those in attendance thought that should have been the whole purpose of the meeting.

But how are we to discern the Spirit's leading exactly? My answer is that we have to do it *corporately*, by listening together not only in silence but also in conversation with one another. I believe we did that. It was quite untidy, as it must be when there are so many voices to be heard—voices of concern, of perplexity and uncertainty. What else should we have expected? This is a big step. There is a lot at stake.

The word we use to describe what we were seeking on Saturday is *consensus*. In consensus we develop an awareness of a common or shared desire that both respects differences and finds a shared way forward that can encompass those differences. Consensus cannot be forced. It is different than a vote, which ultimately divides us into winners and losers. Consensus is a discernment of the spirit of a gathering. For us as Christians it comes from listening to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.

My impression of the meeting is that overall there is a desire to move ahead together to select what appears to be the best option. And we need to think about the best way to determine which option will express that consensus most fully.

Over the next few weeks I will be meeting with the Lay and Clergy leaders who have *worked* hard and *thought* hard and *prayed* hard to bring the process to the point where some clear evidence-based options are on the table. And given what I discern is an overall consensus to select one and move towards implementing it, I will ask what *they* believe is the best choice. They are leaders after all. They are the ones most familiar with the evidence drawn from all the parishes, Anglican and Lutheran. Once they have developed their own consensus I will ask them to bring it to you as individuals and congregations for your support.

In all this I find these words from the Letter to the Ephesians helpful. Call it body building if you want but this is where your hard work is leading:

*Each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift. The gifts he gave were that some would become apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors, some teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry for the building up the body of Christ until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to the measure of the full stature of Christ. (Ephesians 4.7,11-13)*

In the New Testament 'the saints' are *all* the believers and not just the holy superstars. It is interesting how much of what has been achieved in this project in Peterborough has been through the efforts of the men and the women in the pews. The clergy have their part in continuing to offer their gifts as well: pastoring, teaching, leading in worship. But it is the laity who have gathered and organized the evidence on which you will base your decision. We are given the gifts we need to equip one another and build up the Body of Christ. The goal is the unity of faith, acting together to become a fuller expression of the person of Christ for our day in Peterborough.

I am grateful to the Archbishop and to your leaders who have invited me to participate more fully in your efforts to discern a way forward. You are acting corporately as the Body of Christ, God's expressed presence in your city, embodying the person and spirit of Jesus.

***Glory to God whose power working in us can do infinitely more  
than we can ask or imagine.  
Glory to God from generation to generation  
in the church and in Christ Jesus  
forever and ever Amen.***

Yours faithfully,



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