

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Anglican Deacons Commit to Challenging the Church to Abandon Charity Model

Victoria—August 3, 2017. The triennial conference of the Association of Anglican Deacons in Canada took place July 27-30. The event was hosted by the Chapter of Deacons of the Diocese of British Columbia. Over 70 delegates came from across Canada and as far south as Tennessee and Oregon, USA. The conference focused on two themes: social justice, and reconciliation with First Nations.

Elizabeth May, MP and leader of the Green Party of Canada opened the conference with a rich theological presentation on Leonard Cohen's "anthem." She explored the meaning of brokenness and the "light that is more than mere darkness." She named the liminal place deacons often find themselves in their work—a place where hope breaks through seemingly impenetrable darkness.

The presentations began with stories from people who have lived on the streets. They spoke of the judgment, and stigma they experienced. Other panelists, representing local agencies challenged the delegates to look at the attitudes and beliefs that allow for systemic poverty and the lack of basic services for the growing number of people who live below the poverty line.

One recurring theme was the importance of acknowledging the role trauma plays in shaping our society including the trauma imposed by the welfare system, the trauma of stigma and racism and intergenerational trauma within families.

Ryan Weston, (Public Witness for Social and Ecological Justice, Anglican Church of Canada) offered a reflection on the presentations. What was evident was that while the church has been complicit in maintaining these social systems through the charity model of action, there is a growing awareness of the importance of social justice action. Deacons are called to bridge the chasm between charity and justice.

The welcome and presentation by Butch Dick at the Saturday dinner at the Songhees Wellness Centre set the tone for the exploration of the theme of reconciliation with First Nations. Logan McMenemy, bishop of the Anglican Diocese of British Columbia, shared a reflection on reconciliation and screened the documentary, "One Step" which tells the story of the 480km walk the bishop took in 2016 from Alert Bay to Victoria in an effort to open the door towards reconciliation between the church and First Peoples. Dallas Smith of the Nanwakolas Council, and Melanie Delva (reconciliation animator for the ACC), shared their own perspectives on living into reconciliation. Delegates were moved, and challenged to re-think assumptions and unconscious biases.

The Association of Anglican Deacons in Canada will, through its members, continue to monitor and challenge the church's engagement with social justice and reconciliation. They will continue to be informed by and include those who live on the margins and the community agencies who advocate for them.

About the Association of Anglican Deacons

At the heart of the diaconate is a Christian whose ordained ministry is within a serving community, living and proclaiming the Gospel in the world. The deacon's presence, bringing the needs, concerns and hopes of the world to the church, is a living reminder of the community's call to servanthood. A deacon is to enable the church to be justice makers, truth tellers, advocates and reconcilers in the world.

The Association of Anglican Deacons in Canada supports deacons and aspirants to the diaconate in a variety of ways including: encouraging a personal prayer life that includes the needs and interests of the world, educating the church about the role of deacons in the Anglican Church of Canada, developing guidelines for discernment and training, communicating on behalf of deacons in Canada, and partnering with Episcopal deacons, ecumenical partners, and community organizations.

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