



# 2014 Pre-Synod Discussion Guide

## **Introduction**

This year, our lead into Synod looks a bit different. After several years of low attendance at the regional pre-synod meetings despite varying the locations, the format and frequency, we consulted diocesan leaders about a number of options for sharing the Synod material. While a few spoke in favour of continuing with the model of regional meetings, many were enthused or at least willing to try an alternative. Accordingly we are experimenting with the way we do our pre-Synod orientation by delivering it in a video and online format. In doing so, we hope to offer a flavor for the Second Session of our 140th Synod while at the same time broadening the circle of those informed about the work of Synod. Our intention is to solicit feedback from Synod delegates and congregations regarding this model post-Synod.

As a way of ensuring the work of Synod continues to benefit from discussion and discernment in advance of our meeting on November 8, we have put together this short guide. There are a variety of creative ways that the resources and questions which follow could be used, among them:

- Showing the video before or after Sunday worship
- Hosting a parish screening of the pre-Synod video and discussion of the matters coming before Synod with parish council, ministry groups and/or or Synod delegates
- Posting the video on your parish Facebook page and inviting reflections
- Individual review and reflection

There are three areas of focus of our upcoming Synod highlighted in this guide: Anglican Identity, Synod Gatherings, and Approving the Budget. These areas can be pondered together or individually depending upon your unique ministry context and needs. You can also visit the Synod webpage ([www.niagaraanglican.ca/synod/2014](http://www.niagaraanglican.ca/synod/2014)) where you (or your parish as a whole) can directly ask questions regarding the matters before Synod. These questions will be answered promptly and the response will be posted on the Synod webpage for all prior to Synod.

## ***The Second Session of the 140<sup>th</sup> Synod of the Diocese of Niagara***

Synod will convene promptly on Saturday, November 8<sup>th</sup> at 9:00 am, with registration in Myler Hall at Christ's Church Cathedral, 252 James Street North in Hamilton beginning at 8:00 am. Our theme this year is: "What is it to be Anglican?"

The Bishop's Charge will be delivered during our opening worship. Our fundamental business will be to hear and reflect upon the Bishop's Charge, to elect Provincial Synod Delegates, to receive financial statements, to discuss and approve the 2014 diocesan budget and to receive other ministry reports. We will also discuss an alternative format for our annual Synod and debate the best way to approve diocesan budgets. There will also be an update on the proposed Cathedral Place Development Project.

## ***A Gathering Prayer***

*Holy One, source of all wisdom and understanding,  
be present with us and those who take counsel for the renewal of your Church.  
Teach us in all things to seek first your honour and glory.  
Equip and inspire us to further your mission and our diocesan vision.  
Guide us to perceive what is right, and grant us both the courage to pursue  
it and the grace to accomplish it; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*



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## Area of Focus: Anglican Identity

In pondering Synod's theme, Bishop Michael Bird wrote the following reflection recently:

As I continue in this role as Diocesan Bishop I am filled, now more than ever, with a tremendous sense of gratitude for the Anglican way in which we live the Christian life and exercise our baptismal ministries as a Church. We have inherited a rich liturgical, theological and structural framework and guideposts that we hold in common, for how we live with each other and how we embrace the people and the world we are called to serve. At the same time, however, we have the ability, the openness and the generosity that is required to envision and nurture unique ways of responding to the variety of local contexts for ministry that we find across our diocese. Our Anglican parishes in Niagara offer innovative and meaningful opportunities for all who come to our doors to experience the power of God's love and the living presence of Jesus Christ and to go beyond those doors to respond to the needs of God's people everywhere. As Bishop I have also had the great privilege of experiencing how that support and interconnectedness extends across the globe in over 165 countries through our membership in the Anglican Communion. I have seen, firsthand, the difference our common life and ministry is making in the troubled regions of our country and around the globe. I am convinced that the more we share and work together in our Diocese and beyond, the closer we will come to God's vision for our church and for the world.

- 1) For you, what *does* it mean to be Anglican?
- 2) How have expressions of "what it means to be Anglican" changed during your life time?

## Area of Focus: Synod Gatherings

The Incorporated Synod of the Diocese of Niagara is the legal entity with responsibility for the dealings of the Anglican Church within its diocesan boundaries. As such, there are a number of legal responsibilities that we must fulfill at every Synod meeting: approving minutes, electing Synod Council, reviewing financial statements and budgets, and authorizing the actions of Synod Council. But a meeting of Synod is much more than that: it provides us both with structure and governance, and with a sense of our identity as part of the family of Anglican Church.

- 3) What does Synod mean to you?

In his 2013 charge to Synod, Bishop Michael asked Synod Council "...to undertake a full review of our own process with consideration for the frequency..." of Synod. A survey of Canadian Diocesan Synods with contexts similar to Niagara's revealed two primary patterns: Synod held annually or biennially. At its annual retreat, Synod Council expressed support for moving to annual one day Synods rather than our current pattern of alternating one and two day meetings of Synod from year to year.

- 4) What do you see as the advantages and disadvantages of changing the timing of our Synods?
- 5) What would be your preference for how we gather as a Synod?



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## **Area of Focus: Approving the Budget**

At its June retreat meeting Synod Council voted to ask the Chancellor and Secretary of Synod to draft a change to our Canons that would permit approval of the diocesan budget by Synod Council. This decision came after much discussion about how to make Synod more nimble and effective for the purposes of our community. It is also consistent with a trend happening throughout Canada whereby most diocesan councils now review and approve diocesan budgets. Our current process is that the diocesan budget is presented to Synod Council in October for final review. It is then presented and a vote to approve the budget happens at Synod in November. The new process – with consultation of key diocesan leaders early in the year and over multiple meetings - would have a vote to approve the budget happen at a Synod Council meeting no later than October and then distributed to members of Synod in November.

It is also worth noting that currently a significant part of the budget is tied to non-discretionary costs (staffing, property). The new approval process also honours and would continue to benefit from the stewardship and expertise and discernment of the Budget Subcommittee, the Financial Advisory Committee, Synod Council and the Diocesan Management Team. Moreover it seeks to address a frequent refrain heard on Synod evaluation forms that meaningful engagement with the budget on the floor of Synod is difficult given the budget's complexity and the time constraints. Moving the approval of the budget to Synod Council's responsibility would free up valuable time for conversations and motions about God's mission and our diocesan priorities for ministry. The proposed change maintains our commitment to having diocesan leaders and ministry partners provide input into the budget and keeps Synod delegates informed; all without taking up valuable time at Synod

**6) What do you see as the benefits and challenges of changing how we approve diocesan budgets?**

**7) If the proposed change was approved, how might you imagine Synod being different, and how might we reorient our work to further God's mission in our community?**

## ***Conclusion***

We hope this brief discussion guide has been useful as you explore the work of our upcoming Synod. You may wish to conclude your reflection on these questions with this prayer:

*Gracious God, we give thanks for the opportunity to gather together.  
May your voice spoken through our questions and reflections,  
offer signposts for living your mission in our corner of the world;  
unite us to the common mission to which you call all people of faith,  
so that your will is done in all manner of things.  
Be with Bishop Michael and all those preparing for our Synod,  
and enfold them with wisdom and grace.  
These things we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Our mutual goal is to best use our collective time and gifts to further God's mission while continuing to be accountable for the business of Synod. We look forward to hearing about your reflections and your discussions! If you have any questions related to Synod, please don't hesitate to contact the Reverend Canon Marni Nancekivell, Secretary of Synod, at [marni.nancekivell@niagaraanglican.ca](mailto:marni.nancekivell@niagaraanglican.ca).