

Trent Durham Area Day 2010

By Jim Weller

The Trent Durham Area Day has become a highly significant and popular annual event. This year's Area Day, held on March 6th at St. Peter's, Cobourg drew over 300 people from throughout the huge Trent Durham area and was widely considered one of the best ever.

The day was built around some 25 sessions for adults, covering a very broad range of topics under the theme: "Waters of Life." There were also concurrent sessions for youth under the theme: "Travelling in some Radical Boots" as well as a program for younger children involving a range of activities. 'The Waters of Life' theme prompted several of the talks to be categorized in terms of water conditions and uses such as: "white water," "still waters," "quenching thirst," etc. For example, Trent-Durham Area Bishop Linda Nicholls told how she sees our faith and our church from her perspective as an experienced canoeist. Also, the closing Eucharist featured a canoe in the sanctuary into which the congregation placed their hopes and prayers written on paper paddles.

Stemming declining church membership

Five well-attended workshops dealt with a current topic on the minds of many active Anglicans: how to come to grips with the present day reality of declining church membership despite a sustained thirst for spirituality within the public at large. In hers, Bishop Linda noted that we are in a "radical paradigm shift" and that, 'while the message we proclaim is timeless, the package it comes in is not.' This much-needed change in packaging was dealt with in sessions by John Bowen of Wycliffe College and Rev. Jenny Anderson of St. Paul's, Bloor St, both of whom focused on the topic of 'Fresh Expressions,' a concept that aims to deal with the reality that an increasing percentage of our population lacks any basic understanding of Jesus and what He stood for. Part of the strategy must be to forget about waiting for people to show up in church and instead to take the church to 'where people are' such as in coffee shops and even pubs. The church must be like water; 'flexible, fluid and changeable,' said Bowen.

Another standing-room only session on church growth was presented by Dave Robinson of the Toronto Diocese office on Natural Church Development (NCD) which he describes as the "fastest growing phenomenon in church health in Canada. It aims to "release the growth potential that God has already implanted in churches" through a series of analytical processes. Also on the topic of stemming the tide of declining church attendance was a session by Rev. Michael Calderwood on ways of using the annual Back to Church Sunday for re-activating lapsed church members and attracting new ones.

Trent-Durham initiatives

Bishop Linda identified some specific actions she proposes to implement to deal with the new realities and needs in the Trent-Durham Area. They include emphasis on Strategic Planning, improving Communications throughout the Area; building local Outreach on the priorities identified by the Diocese; Review the Structures of the Trent Durham area, and Re-evaluation of the process by which the Area Grants are provided to parishes.

The global scene

On the global scale a comprehensive view of the Anglican Church was presented by Archdeacon Paul Feheley, Principal Secretary to our Primate. He has attended all major gatherings including meetings of Primates, the Lambeth Conference and the Anglican Consultative Council in recent years. He gave the background to the drafting of a Covenant prompted by the same sex issues and which comes to General Synod later this year. He described much of what he had seen and heard recently in his role as a White Water Rafting Experience!

Personal aspects of faith

In contrast to the above broad-ranging workshops were others dealing with more personal aspects of our faith. Notable among these was a well-attended, well-presented and lively session by Christian Harvey, Youth Social Justice for Trent Durham about the controversial best-selling book "The Shack" by William Young in which God is portrayed as a black African woman. Divergent views among Harvey's audience were also reflected in video clips featuring William Young the author, and by a highly vocal critic of his work. Other sessions in the category dealt with Hearing the Voice of God in ordinary human experience, Dealing with Divorce and Remarriage, and Learning to See through the eyes of people approaching their final days.

Church life in general

Sessions dealing with church life in general were covered in such topics as Liturgical Dance, the need for Environmental Audits, Church Music, Stimulating Discussions about Sermons, and Stewardship Campaigns. One well-attended session in a category of its own was on the Historical roots of the Christian faith and how it became the single most important influence on Western civilization was presented by Rev. Paul Walker.

Master-minding the program and arrangements was the Rev. Steven Smith of St. Luke's, Peterborough who, together with others from the Area plus many volunteers and the fine facilities provided by St. Peter's, further enhanced the occasion as an important and popular event on the annual calendar of the Trent Durham Episcopal Area.