

TITLE: Wondering Together as a Province

SUBTITLE: Provincial Summit Convenes in Kelowna

BY: Andrew Stephens-Rennie

In July of this year, the Provincial House of Bishops and Provincial Council are gathering in Kelowna, BC, to discern faithful next steps in sharing work and witness throughout the Ecclesiastical Province of British Columbia and Yukon.

This work began in earnest with a Provincial gathering in November 2023.

When we gathered in Vancouver three years ago, participants imagined we would speak about efficiencies and shared services. However, it was vital to each of us to start from a different place. We knew that whatever steps were taken at a Provincial level, it needed to connect people with God and each other, to empower all God's children to faithfully proclaim and embody the gospel in our rapidly changing communities.

Participants asked: "How might we harness provincial and diocesan structures to more effectively and efficiently support local Anglicans, congregations and ministries in their worship, work, and witness?" The church's ancient wisdom grounded us. We anchored our gathering in prayer and deep listening for God's words of invitation. We gathered to deepen trust amongst all the baptized: lay leaders, deacons, priests, and bishops alike.

As we attended to God's invitation and how God was stirring within and amongst us, several commitments emerged.

A province-wide Bible Study was born. Lay and ordained leaders across the Province formed the Provincial School for Congregational Development. While practicing skills in developing and growing congregations, participants build relationships and share learning across geographical lines. Work is underway to develop a Province-wide, trauma-informed safeguarding policy.

Three years later, this work is reconvening in Kelowna.

The work of the 2023 summit took several first steps in discerning God's presence and invitation. The 2026 gathering can build on this foundation. What more can be done together to support local communities as we seek to embody and proclaim the Gospel today? What emotional, spiritual, and practical work will help us to step boldly and expectantly into God's future?

While I don't know exactly how this group will move forward, having participated in the first gathering, I do have my hopes.

*First*, I hope we will dream big. The gospel of Jesus Christ *is* good news in communities like ours that are full of despair. We are so used to thinking about dwindling attendance and resources, I wonder what it would look like to depend on a God who is bigger than our bank accounts, volunteer capacity, or our ability to ask or imagine.

*Second*, I hope that we will continue moving from theory into practice. We've taken a few tentative steps. This is good! Let's identify the gifts that exist throughout our Province, and find ways to better share them in the service of God and God's world.

*Third*, I hope we will set goals and be accountable to one another. If we envision a functional model for shared administration, governance, policy, or Episcopal Ministry, let's set a goal and a timeline. If we light upon new ways of funding ministry, let's identify the next steps in that process.

*Finally*, let's depend on God and on Christ's body, the church, praying ceaselessly for one another, offering, and asking for help.

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