

**REFLECTIONS**  
**DR. GAIL ALLAN, ECUMENICAL OFFICER**  
**UNITED CHURCH OF CANADA**

It has been a blessing to be with you this week. We have been invited to “Draw the circle wide, draw it wider still.” This is a song that has also become a favourite in the United Church. As we have been singing it, I’ve been thinking that this song represents a fine Anglican/United Church shared ministry – that of the Common Cup Company, who have gifted us all with powerful visions in song of who we can be when we come together in the community of God’s love. And, if I’m not mistaken, it is a ministry with strong roots right here in Winnipeg.

I am continually inspired and strengthened by all the ways we do share in ministry—in ecumenical shared ministry congregations dotted across this country, in the lively discussions of Anglican/United Church dialogue, in projects of theological education and in the work of justice and reconciliation to which we were called again as we renewed our Covenant to work for justice for Aboriginal peoples on Thursday.

This brings me to a first point of reflection on the events of this Synod. As at our own General Council last summer, here again I have been challenged and blessed by the voices of the First Nations members of our churches. I would venture to suggest that one of the most important, hardest tasks you and all of us have taken on in these days will be living into, and out of, the commitments expressed in your installation of Bishop MacDonald, and in your careful attention to the concerns of the Anglican Council of Indigenous Peoples and the Council of the North. As I think we heard clearly from the members of ACIP on Friday evening, these commitments, like those of the Covenant on Thursday, will only be fully lived out as we integrate the desire for justice and inclusion of Aboriginal members of our churches, with the desire for justice for First Nations in Canada as a whole. As my colleague, Laverne Jacobs, said on Friday, the journey toward justice and right relationships is just beginning. There are many opportunities before us to engage in this work, as you heard in the Residential Schools Report this afternoon. I hope we will join together to draw a circle that includes all the peoples in this land.

I have been deeply moved this week, to sit among you as you have engaged in a profound struggle to articulate the nature of the community you need to be to embody God’s love in and for the world. I have seen your passion for this church, for your global relationships, for justice and for unity. And, I have heard compassion for each person whose life will be shaped by the decisions you have been called to make.

Our theme song affirms that “No one stands alone...” Indeed, we are “standing side by side...” This week, members of St. Andrew’s Haney United Church have been praying each day for this Synod and your church. You are being held in prayer by people in the United Church across Canada who know only too well the pain and struggle in the decisions you have been making, even as we recognize the significant differences in

polity and theology that affect those decisions. Our experience has taught us that the journey from this place will not be an easy one; we know there are those in the United Church who continue to struggle with the understandings of sexuality and relationship expressed in our decisions. However, I think we have also learned that it is possible to draw a circle wide enough to hold all of those who are willing to remain engaged in conversation with minds and hearts open to the new things the Spirit of God may be doing in your midst.

And, yes, as in the experience of the United Church that was mentioned during the debate, there will be those who feel they can no longer find a way to stay in this circle. The church will suffer from their loss, and I would not minimize that. But I do believe it is possible to suffer through these losses and find new sources of life, and possibilities for reconciliation and transformation. I belong to a congregation strongly committed to justice and diversity that is welcoming upwards of a dozen new members every few months. I mention that only because I believe people seek community where they can feel accepted in their differences, and where they can express their doubts and questions, hopes and dreams. Threaded through much of the debate and struggle this week, I have heard your deep desire to be such a community. I am filled with great respect for the way you have listened to each other as you seek paths into the future.

There is hope in struggle... and to find that hope will ask of you a willingness to keep listening and keep telling your stories to one another. You will be called to a journey of healing, one which makes room for the voices of all who feel hurt by this process, whatever the outcome, and one which recognizes that real unity is characterized by the diversity and complexity that is God's very creation.

I pray that as you continue to draw your circles wide, the dreams you dream will offer new life to all. There is much work before us in a world where structures of domination marginalize, oppress and impoverish God's people and threaten the destruction of creation. Your search here for the meaning of just and inclusive community is connected with your work toward global justice. Know that in all of that work we will journey with you, in prayer, in action and in hope.