

## The Call to God's Mission

The life cycle of salmon is a good metaphor for the community of faith. Scott Douglas has created a beautiful poetic account of the salmon's journey through the waters of life. This poetry informed a recent national gathering of regional and national staff, educators, and leaders of diverse congregations and community ministries.

“Beyond Survival to God's Mission” drew together 65 leaders to conversations aimed at cultivating a shared approach to foster healthy congregations and ministries participating fully in God's mission.

Key goals included

- building networks through strengthened relationships
- storytelling of experiences, insights, and learnings
- sharing resources
- deepening understanding of the contexts of ministry

The use of the Aboriginal medicine wheel helped participants to frame and interpret the progress of their conversations.

Resources included

- Scott Douglas's “Song of the Salmon”
- Wehn-In Ng's reflections on the post-colonial feminist intercultural church
- an interview with Mark MacDonald, the Anglican Church's national Indigenous bishop, reflecting on the history of church engagement with First Nations

Moving beyond simply institutional maintenance and organizational survival and focusing energies on God's mission was an underlying imperative of the event. What follows is a brief reflection on the context of ministry.

Christians engage their context because the Spirit is already active there both sharing in the suffering of people and creation, as well as drawing them to healing, wholeness, and justice of God.

“A changing culture constitutes a call from God,” said the World Council of Churches in the 1960s. How so, we wonder?

All around us, the familiar markings of cultural Christianity are disappearing. Church bells have become part of the distracting noise, rather than a divine invitation. Bibles are not even dust catchers on shelves in most homes. The historic symbols are known to few.

The culture has changed and is changing. Diversity replaces homogeneity—Canada's cities are a mosaic of cultural communities. Pluralism pushes aside conformity—mosques, temples, and gurdwaras now complement churches and synagogues. Institutional religion burdened

by its own history is yielding place to individualistic spirituality and swift-response popular movements. Avaaz is the new global Internet wave for ethical and transformative citizenship in the world. The world is demonstrably a global village.

To this we now add an economic crisis of colossal proportions and the spectre of unemployment, increased poverty, armed conflicts, and fear of the future. Not even trillions of dollars seem to be able to turn the tide! We have learned again that economy and ecology are closely linked. Plundering creation without attention to its limits for suffering and degradation is a fool's game.

So in this vastly changing culture, what is God telling us? What is God calling us to be and do?

We hear that to be fully human the spiritual dimension needs to be taken seriously. We are matter, but also more than matter. Incarnation was not a once-for-all event. The Christ in me greets the Christ in you and together our spirits are invited to relate to the Creator and Spirit. Faith. We hear the Spirit as we listen to each other.

We read our context and understand that God's creation—flora, fauna, earth, air, water—deserves our respect, our care, our appreciation. We are creatures within creation. Our selfish plundering ways harm ourselves. We hear the Spirit calling us to live in deeper, responsive harmony with the environment.

The culture tells us of its urgent need for gentler, more just, grateful, and generous ways of being. We are called to participate in the divine compassion, that boundless yearning for more wholeness, so that all the life God creates can flower to its full expression.

God speaks to us in the changing culture because God's creating, redeeming, and sustaining presence is persistently alive and well throughout the world and beyond. People of faith—those who relate to God—know that even in a seemingly alien and unjust culture, the Holy Mystery keeps calling all people to share in the divine mission of healing, redeeming, and blessing the world.

In this hugely changed and changing global culture, the church has a vocation to attune its ears, eyes, and especially its heart to experience the call of God to new and more faithful ways of engaging the context we inhabit.

— *A.H. Harry Oussoren*