



BY RANDALL FAIREY

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Commentary

COGS wheels

The business of the Council of General Synod meeting in November has been fully summarized on the national website. We discussed many topics including some truly significant issues in the life of the Anglican Church of Canada and I will comment on these in more detail in future columns. The issue for this month is finances.

Rita Mae Brown in her book "Sudden Death" (1983) wrote "Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again but expecting different results." I do not want to infer that the Financial Management Committee is anything but both rational and effective and the ACC is blessed by

able leadership in its Chair, Rob Dickson, and our Treasurer of General Synod, Michèle George. It was evident, however, that at the end of the CoGS session there remains serious disquiet about the future financial health of our Church and frustration that the Lay and Clergy leaders of the Church, including the House of Bishops, are having difficulty aligning the Strategic Plan of General Synod, Vision 2019, with the financial realities that lie ahead. I will try to explain.

Recognizing that the Church was hemorrhaging financially through repeated deficits, the Council in 2008 mandated General Synod to eliminate deficit financing by 2012. By means of painful staff and program cuts at Church House, and setting up both a Ministry Investment Fund from undesignated donations and budgeting a GS Officer's Discretionary Reserve, the Finance Department, led by Michèle and Rob, succeeded by 2011 — a year

earlier than thought achievable! At this last CoGS meeting a budget for 2012 was approved with a similarly small surplus; however, forecasts for 2013 and 2014, and worsening trends for 2015 and 2016, mean we are inevitably heading for proportionately even larger deficits than pre-2008 unless we truly do something different. Hence my quote!

How we wrestle with these realities became the focus of an important and emotional debate at CoGS. This unfortunately, as often happens in controversies, in the last hours of the meeting. The outcome was this resolution: "That this Council of General Synod set aside two full days to consider clear directions and a plan for the efficient utilization of financial, staff and structural resources in the achieving of the priorities and practices set out in Vision 2019."

Implicit in the resolution, is the challenge, which was so clearly and passionately articulated dur-

ing the debate by our Primate, Fred Hiltz, and that is for all of us to ensure Vision 2019 works. We have spent hours on designing this major strategic plan, with well-crafted Practices and Priorities; it is critical that we put this into action.

Also important to the financial picture is the fact that proportional giving from the dioceses is dropping at a steady rate each year (about 3%) so something truly different and radical has to happen in order to turn this around. CoGS has previously endorsed Together in Mission (TIM) a nation-wide fund-raising campaign, which will still take one or two years to unfold. Unlike past successful "top-down" campaigns such as Anglicans in Mission, this will empower grass-roots fund-raising so participating parishes and dioceses will keep significant proportions of new money for their own ministries. But early participation is both selective and voluntary. □

Vision 2019s Practice One is: "Create structures that work for the church now and for God's mission." I believe this particular practice is holding us back because we remain afraid to move to new ways of structuring Church. Many Bishops and Clergy and Laity are not willing to let go of their parishes, or dioceses, or modify synod administration so we persist in preserving and funding costly structures that are not working efficiently, rather than create new structures that work better. We can do this the hard way, by letting financial reality inexorably force us into change. This is not theoretical since we have the recent example where the Diocese of Moosonee has been forced to stand down. Or we can use Vision 2019's constructive dialogue about designing an affordable Church for the 21st Century freeing badly needed resources for funding the mission of God. □



BY NISSA BASBAUM

Culture meets religion

too sweet, some didn't seem traditional enough, some contained a variety of nuts of which I am not particularly fond.

Having exhausted the general cookbooks, I started scanning some of the other books on the shelves and landed in the Jewish section. Some people might wonder why in the heck I would search a Jewish cookbook for a Greek recipe? The answer to this is easy: Jews are found all over the world. Indeed, in one of those cookbooks I found the perfect recipe for baklava — relatively easy to make, not too sweet and containing pistachio rather than walnuts. So, was the recipe Greek or Jewish, or was it both? At that precise moment in time, I couldn't have cared less. It was baklava and it was the baklava recipe I was going to make for the Greek dinner to which we had been invited. The fact that its source was a Jewish cookbook was frankly immaterial.

By virtue of my position as one of the priests at Church of

the Transfiguration in the Diocese of Niagara, I was once asked to participate in a service that turned out to be both foreign and familiar. Ayo, the husband of one of the couples in our congregation was born and brought up in Nigeria. Ayo and Carrie were expecting a child and, prior to the baby's arrival, they requested that I be present at a "naming" ceremony which, in Nigerian tradition, takes place eight days after the birth of a baby. I was asked to lead the Christian part of the service — essentially the liturgy found in the BAS describing a thanksgiving for a safe pregnancy and delivery, and a welcoming of the new child. Thankfully, someone far more Nigerian than I would be leading the African ritual. The service took place at eight o'clock in the morning in their home.

During the ceremony, I discovered how closely intertwined are culture and religion and how, as Christians, we often forget the importance of

the former in a bid to emphasize the primacy of the latter. With respect to this, one of the most interesting aspects of the African liturgy was the verbal response following the presentation and offering of each symbol to the new baby. In the same manner that Christians say "amen," the African word "ashair" repeatedly affirmed what the officiant was doing, making it obvious that much of Christianity, rather than being unique, has a commonality with other traditions. As someone who was brought up Jewish, I have some sense of this commonality, since Judaism generally exhibits both a marriage and a tug-of-war between culture and religion. Witness, for example, my search for a Greek dessert recipe in a Jewish cookbook; Jews are a combination of both their religion and the culture in which they reside.

What I learned from my participation in this Nigerian ceremony, however, is that Christians are much the same,

and to submerge this connection to culture is to deny a huge part of our existence as human beings. Perhaps even more concerning, to submerge this connection is also to deny how so much of our religion has, in fact, evolved from culture; this submerging being done in order to make it seem as if Christianity stands alone, apart, unique and somehow objectively superior to all else. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out just how negative a force this can be.

In his thanks to me regarding my participation in the naming ceremony, Ayo wrote: "Words are not enough to express what this means to us, especially to my people back home who are both highly religious and cultural. Being a member of the Canadian Anglican Communion is a blessing for me because it embraces not only my religious ideals, but my culture."

To this, I need only say **Amen** — or perhaps I should say "ashair." □

A number of years ago, Robin and I were invited to a friend's for dinner. The meal was Greek and each guest's contribution was to be something of Greek origin. We were to bring dessert and, after checking out the various possibilities, I settled on baklava. I soon discovered, however, that there are various renditions of baklava, each slightly different from the other.

Those people who know me are aware of the numerous cookbooks that line the shelves of our kitchen. Yet, even possessing as many of these as I do, there are no Greek ones, so I began to scan the indexes of all my general cookbooks for baklava recipes, and I found many; unfortunately, none quite suitable. Some seemed