

# Local church embraces diversity in growing congregation

*Indigenous, Indian and African worshippers and traditions are welcomed into services*

29/10/18

**BY DEBORAH KRAFT**  
FOR DIVERSITY THUNDER BAY

**W**HEN I was a child, my father's job meant that my family moved every two to four years — from Terrace Bay, where I was born, to Wisconsin, then on to Niagara Falls, Quebec, Toronto, France, and England. I found the moves exciting and enjoyed making friends in each new place, seeking to adapt to local customs and behaviours.

It wasn't always easy — sometimes children found my Canadian accent strange and usually I did not know their games or songs. Fortunately, almost without exception, the children would reach out to help me feel at home, and I have never forgotten their generosity of spirit.

Today, at St. Paul's Anglican Church in Thunder Bay, we are a diverse faith community walking together and sharing our journey. Our congregation shares a commitment to serving God and the community, but we are different in our backgrounds, languages, ages, education, cultures, habits, employment, and



ONE CITY  
MANY VOICES

**Thunder Bay's Anti-Racism and Respect Committee produces this monthly column to promote greater understanding of race relations in Northwestern Ontario.**

incomes. It is only through respectful listening and genuine commitment to diversity that the faith community can come together with understanding and non-judgment.

We have a growing Indigenous population at the church and a dynamic partnership with Bishop Lydia Mamakwa of the Diocese of Mishamikoweesh. Our commitment to building relationships has resulted in a variety of initiatives, such as using syllabics for a welcome sign outside our church and in a welcome

announcement in our weekly bulletin. All of the Anglican churches in Thunder Bay and along the North Shore have done the same.

At St. Paul's, there are four Indigenous elders serving as lay ministers and we sing at least one song in Cree during our weekly service. We have translated some Cree prayers from syllabics into SRO (Standard Roman Orthography) and taught them to the congregation.

It is beautiful sign of respect when a non-Indigenous person kneels to receive the chalice at communion from an Indigenous person, or when the whole congregation sings together in Cree. We enjoy bannock at coffee hour and have been instructed in beading at several of our Food for the Soul workshops.

We also have worshippers from India and Africa and we strive to understand and embrace their traditions too.

Three of the 94 Calls to Action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission relate to the church, and we are working towards implementing the action steps.

Call to Action 59 relates to educa-

tional strategies to be carried out by the church to ensure that the church's role in colonization and residential schools is known and to explain why church apologies were necessary. Many of our Anglican youth and adults have participated in an event called The Blanket Exercise, in which blankets are spread out to represent land and moved around to demonstrate the effects of treaties.

Call to Action 60 calls us to collaborate with Indigenous spiritual leaders and to respect their spiritual traditions. At St. Paul's, we have been moved by drumming and sweetgrass ceremonies led by elders.

The third Call to Action that relates to the church is Call to Action 61, which encourages funding for relationship-building, education, and self-determination. There is growing support for a self-determining Indigenous Anglican Church within the Anglican Church of Canada. Our Diocese of Algoma, under the leadership of Bishop Anne Germond, has initiated an Indigenous Fund, which will be used to support the growth of Indigenous ministry,

locally in Thunder Bay and all the way to Muskoka.

Of course, what we are doing with the Indigenous people and other groups within the church body is not enough. So far, we have one Indigenous person and one newcomer from Sierra Leone on our advisory board, but I would like see every group have a strong voice at the church's decision-making table. I would also like to have more of our worship said in Cree.

I am pleased to report that Anglican Christians are committed to this journey towards diversity. We have moved from lip service to active listening and participation. I look forward to seeing this process broaden and deepen into joyful journey to healthy relationships among us all. In the meantime, we have miles to go before we sleep.

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*The views and opinions expressed in this column are those of the author.*