

# The Diocese of the Arctic

## ANGLICAN CHURCH OF CANADA



## Diocese of the Arctic Profile

The Diocese of the Arctic covers an area of some four million square kilometres (1.5 million square miles) that is, one third the area of Canada and fifteen times the area of the United Kingdom. It stretches in the West from the border of Yukon Territory, is bounded to the South by the 60th parallel, and in the East includes the north coast of Quebec from James Bay to the tip of Labrador. To the North its ministry stretches to the most northerly permanent civilian settlement in Canada, that of Grise Fiord. The people in this vast area however, number only 95,000 with Inuit living above the treeline, Dene living south of this and a few people whose origin is traced to other areas of the world in all communities.

Most of the Inuit are members of the Anglican Church. Those whose origins are traced to outside the boundary of the Diocese represent the whole spectrum of Christian denominations found elsewhere. The Anglican and Roman Catholic churches serve the whole area, but the United, Lutheran, Baptist and Pentecostal churches also serve some communities. The first regular contact of the people of the area, which now constitutes the Diocese of The Arctic, with other people of the world, happened only during the 19th century and later. Many of their first contacts were with whalers and traders who came seeking the resources of the area. A number of traders were great Christians bringing their faith as well as their trade-goods to the North. Their support and encouragement were often vital to the missionaries that came to this land and in the founding of the Church here. In fact, the pattern of the coming of the Church of the North can only be understood as we see also the development of the area for trade with the indigenous peoples.

In the far West the history of the work of the ordained members of the Anglican Church goes back to 1858 when Archdeacon James Hunter of the Diocese of Rupert's Land first met and ministered to the people of the Upper Mackenzie (Fort Simpson) but it was not until two decades later that the Good News of Jesus Christ was carried to the Inuit of the Mackenzie Delta (Aklavik) and it was not until 1915 that the Reverend Herbert Girling moved east along the coast to reach the Inuit of the Coronation Gulf (Kugluktuk, formerly Coppermine).

The Inuit of the West Coast of Hudson Bay (Arviat, formerly Eskimo Point) learned of Jesus Christ through visiting Churchill where in 1883 the Reverend Joseph Lofthouse ministered. It was not until 1926 however, that a long term ordained residential ministry was established in the area by the Reverend Donald B. Marsh (later the second Bishop of the Arctic).

In 1853 a mission had been established at Fort George in James Bay and the Gospel of Jesus Christ was carried up the east coast of Hudson Bay (Great Whale River). The year 1884 saw the Reverend James Peck travelling overland from the coast into Ungava Bay (Kuujuuaq, formerly Fort Chimo) which had been influenced already by the faithful work of the Moravian Church on the Labrador. In 1894 the Reverend Peck extended his work further north establishing a mission at Blacklead Island (near Pangnirtung) from which the Gospel of Christ spread across Baffin Island. In writing of the spread of the Gospel and the establishment of the Anglican Church in the Diocese special mention must be made of the role of lay people of all races who by simply sharing their faith by action and word brought others to faith in Christ. There were also hospitals and schools established by the churches that had an important role to play in bringing the love of Christ to the people of the North.

Very quickly after coming to faith in Christ, the indigenous people themselves began to take formal leadership roles in their church, becoming lay readers and catechists, first in their small camps but later also in large settlements that have grown up. Early in the life of the northern church indigenous people were called to the ordained ministry, the first being John Tssietla, a Gwich'in, and Thomas Umaok, an Inuk, being ordained as deacons in 1928. Rev. Armand Tagoona and Rev. J.E. Sittichinli were ordained in 1960 to become the first Inuk and first Gwich'in priest to serve in the Diocese of The Arctic.

Various training courses have been used over the years for catechist and lay reader training and their development to meet present day needs continues. The training of ordinands was formalized with the establishment of the Arthur Turner Training School in Pangnirtung, in 1970, today ATTS is located in Iqaluit. (Arthur Turner was the missionary in Pangnirtung, with a few breaks, from 1928 until his death there in 1953). Inuit Ordinands are trained at ATTS. They travel with their families to Iqaluit for a three-year course. There, under the direction of the director, with assistance from teachers from universities, seminaries, and churches in Canada and around the world, they receive a comprehensive training and education to fit them for the ordained ministry of the Church. As a result of the work at ATTS, three quarters of the priests and deacons in the Diocese are Inuit or Gwich'in. Of our forty-one clergy, four are Gwich'in ten Inuit are deacons. One bishop is Metis, ten Inuit are priests, two are bishops and three are retired bishops who continue to assist in ministry. Many others have either died or retired. The Arctic has eleven non-indigenous clergy six of whom are from other countries.

We must return in history somewhat to recount the beginnings of our life as a Diocese. For many years, the work in the area, which now comprises our Diocese, was supervised by a number of dioceses. This was consolidated in 1927 under the leadership of Archdeacon Archibald Lang Fleming. In 1933 when the Diocese of The Arctic was formed the Archdeacon became its first Bishop. The Rt. Rev. Donald B. Marsh succeeded Bishop Fleming in 1950.

In 1962 the Rt. Rev. H.G. Cook was elected to be Bishop Suffragan to assist in the work of this huge Diocese. Shortly after this however the Mackenzie area of the Diocese was removed to become an episcopal district and later a part of the Diocese of Athabasca. In 1975, with the Rt. Rev. J.R. Sperry having been elected Diocesan Bishop, the Mackenzie area again became a valued part of the Diocese of The Arctic. In 1980 the Rt. Rev. J.C.M. Clarke was elected Bishop Suffragan assisting in the episcopal work of the Diocese until his retirement. In 1987, the Rt. Rev. J.C.R. Williams was elected Bishop Suffragan and in 1990 Bishop Coadjutor, becoming Diocesan in 1991. In 1993, Rt. Rev. Terry Buckle was elected Bishop Suffragan and in 1995 he became Bishop of the Yukon. In 1996, the Rt. Rev. Paul Idlout was elected the first Inuk Suffragan Bishop and was presented with Bishop Marsh's ring. In 1999, two additional Suffragan Bishops were elected.

These bishops had parishes in the geographic area for which they were responsible. Rt. Rev. Andrew Atagotaaluk had oversight for Nunavik (Northern Quebec) and Rt. Rev. Larry Robertson had oversight for Mackenzie/Kitikmeot. In 2002 Rt. Rev. Andrew Atagotaaluk was elected to be the 5<sup>th</sup> Bishop of the Arctic and Rt. Rev. Benjamin Arreak was elected as Suffragan bishop. In 2012 Rt. Rev. Darren McCartney was elected Suffragan Bishop and Rt. Rev David W Parsons was elected to be the 6<sup>th</sup> Bishop of the Arctic. In 2019 Rt. Rev. Darren McCartney resigned as Suffragan and three additional Suffragan Bishops were elected. Rt. Rev Joey Royal, Rt. Rev. Annie Ittoshat and Rt. Rev. Lucy Netser. Rt. Rev Joey Royal oversees ATTS, the High Arctic and South Baffin Deaneries. Rt. Rev. Annie Ittoshat is Rector of Salluit and oversees Ungava and the Hudson Coast Deaneries. Rt. Rev. Lucy Netser is Rector of Arviat and oversees the Kivalliq and Kitikmeot Deaneries.

Other major changes occurred in the administration and care of the Diocese. In 1972 the Diocese held its first constituted synod in Iqaluit, adopting a constitution with canons leading to government by synod. This meets every three years for about a week and has the unique feature of having all its proceedings in at least two languages. In between synods a duly elected Executive Committee has the responsibility for the making of important decisions for the synod.

With such a vast Diocese there has always been a problem as to where best in Canada the Bishop of The Arctic and the administrative office of the Diocese should be located. When the Diocese was formed its bishop and his offices were located in the Toronto area but with the election of Bishop Cook, the Bishop Suffragan set up his residence in Yellowknife and when Bishop Sperry was elected the Diocesan also moved into the Diocese living in Iqaluit and later in Yellowknife. In 1996 the diocesan office was relocated to Yellowknife.

All this however is nothing if there is not growth encouraged and happening among the people of our Diocese. Over the years and particularly since the 1950s the small nomadic groups of people have gathered into permanent settlements many of which have populations of 1,000 or more, with varying degrees of self-government. On April 1, 1999, a dream was realized with the creation of Nunavut. However, the Diocese of the Arctic remains united. The Anglican Church has congregations in fifty-one of these settlements and in all but six of these congregations the indigenous language of the area is used for the main Sunday worship. Some measure of the commitment of Christ of the people of the North can be demonstrated by the fact that of the fifty one communities, nine are financially self-supporting, and this number rises even though we live in the most expensive part of Canada and the economy is weak. While many dioceses in Canada are downsizing, closing churches we are upsizing. We hired 3 additional Synod office staff recruited 9 priests ordained 10 deacons with plans to ordain 4 more.

The members of our Diocese see their commitment to Christ leading them to actions whose results go far beyond the church walls into their own communities, our country and indeed among the many places around the world whose needs have been made known to them. The magnificence of the response of the people of the North to news of world hunger has made headlines many times.

Christ is active in His Church in a glorious way, but so are the forces of evil. The abuse of alcohol and drugs is the concern of every member of our church. Sexual immorality, and the all too frequent artificial abortions are the church's concern. Suicides, especially among the young are common. We were asked what we were going to do about all the suicides? We asked God, "How do we help people who are thinking about ending in their lives to choose life and how do youth learn? God gave us an answer and a vision.

“Young people are influenced by their peers. Therefore, hire a fulltime youth coordinator to find Godly evangelistic teenagers and teach them how to come alongside and influence their peers, teenagers and people in their twenties and thirties. Train an army of youth ministers to enter every area of society and workforce.” We hired a Diocesan Youth Coordinator who embraced the vision and developed a youth network, a team of youth leaders, organized training schools, held a Diocesan Youth Conference organized two Teens Encounter Christ weekends. Many Yellowknife denominations helped our Youth Coordinator as did a few ministries across North America. These efforts were influencing youth across the Arctic. In 2019 our Youth Coordinator and husband were blessed with a baby and so now with God’s help we are searching for another person to take over this valuable ministry.

In the Arctic unemployment is extremely high. The future is so uncertain. These and others are the concerns of the church in the Diocese of The Arctic, but in Christ' Name, in the power of the Holy Spirit, in the lives of so many these problems are being met and solved to the glory of God's name.

## **The Fellowship of The Arctic**

A number of Arctic Fellowship groups have been formed over the last few years and the question that keeps being asked is, "What now?" That question has no easy answer for each group is unique as to location, the ease with which its members can get together, where its members are in their following Christ and the style of their discipleship. The following brief comments are made to encourage the formation of Arctic Fellowship groups and to help each group to answer that question of "What now?" for them. When the first Bishop of the Arctic, the late Rt. Rev. Archibald Fleming, began the formation of Arctic Fellowship groups, one of his great concerns was the raising of funds to support the Lord's work in the vast area for which he was responsible as bishop. He quite clearly stated however, that that was not to be the primary function of these groups. He wrote, ...the order must always be interest, prayer and money... if interest is aroused and sincere and devout prayer offered, then gifts will follow'. His words have been proved true time and time again and this, we still feel must be the order of importance for all Arctic Fellowship groups when formed — true interest, then informed and intelligent prayer and finally, if appropriate, the raising of funds.

## **Interest**

Despite the explosion of information, which characterizes our age, many people know very little, if anything of the work of the Church in the North. It is not that people, especially church people, do not want to know of Christ's work but that the opportunity to learn of the Church in the Arctic has not come their way. When they do learn they are extremely interested. The Diocese of the Arctic seeks to make information about its work available and so encourage interest in a number of ways. When the Diocesan Bishop and Suffragan Bishops are available they are very happy to entertain invitations to meet and speak with people and they encourage other Diocesan personnel to do the same, even though this might disturb holidays and other very necessary times of relaxation. Contacts can be made directly or through the Diocesan office in Yellowknife. To assist organizers of regional meetings addresses of local supporters are available on mailing labels from the diocesan office.

## **Prayer**

Out of interest comes prayer and the importance of this cannot be over-estimated. This is difficult work, but it bears fruit way in excess of the effort demanded. To know that such prayer is being offered is also of great encouragement to those for whom it is made. The diocese publishes regularly with ARCTIC NEWS a list of parishes and congregations together with the names of the clergy and their wives to assist people to regularly pray for all the people of our diocese. We also seek to encourage prayer links between the parishes of the North and South. We do ask that these links be made initially through the Diocesan Office so that those with few do not get neglected. Concerning this we would point out that correspondence from numerous places can be a real burden on a northern desk, but now that all places are readily accessible by telephone a number of Fellowships make it a practice before they meet to phone their contacts in the North to get up-to-date information. Just two words of warning — you may find the delay in conversation because of the satellite system disconcerting and you may have to speak through an interpreter.

## **Funds**

Since the formation of the first Arctic Fellowship the financial situation of the Diocese of the Arctic has changed enormously. The Anglican Church of Canada through its national organization has accepted a major responsibility for financing the work of the church in the Diocese. Thus, every Anglican in Canada through their giving in the local congregation makes an unbelievably valuable contribution to the work of the Diocese of the Arctic. These all-together total approximately 30% of the funds needed by our churches. We are incredibly grateful for this essential support. In the Diocese itself there have been considerable changes in the financial well being of our people which is reflected in their giving to the work of their own church and diocese. Although many of our people are at the lower end of the income scale in Canada, the Diocese itself produces 45% of the money needed for its work. Of the forty-nine parish communities nine are self-supporting.

Friends of the Diocese of Arctic Fellowship members provide the balance of the diocesan income. Some of this comes through wills and legacies (15%) and the rest by regular donations and gifts (10%). These figures may seem small, but they represent considerable funds which enable the Arthur Turner Training School in Iqaluit to operate, facilitate the training of parish Lay Readers and Diocesan Lay Leaders (Catechists), make it possible for the Diocese to hold clergy conferences and workshops and also to make the many essential major repairs of houses and churches, when other funding is not available. The financial support that we receive from Arctic Fellowship groups and friends of the Arctic is therefore not inconsiderable and for this we praise God.