

One month ago, our ABT--Alberta and the Territories--Synod gathered together for a "study conference". Having visited and celebrated, preached and presented around the province the previous month-and-a-half--body, soul and spirit so well-fed, repeatedly, continuously--I felt drawn to stay on, to take in this event, which seemed to me to offer more insight than simply study, and seemed to me to be more real-life than simply conference.

Bishop Mark McDonald, Anglican Bishop for Canada's First Nations, had been invited to be our speaker . . . really, our inspirer, our guide, our "guru". He came accompanied by two First Nations sisters, Evelyn and Sandra, and one Metís brother, Ron. Notwithstanding the irony of hiding behind the heavy drapes of the conference room, we gathered to celebrate creation (confession--I did peek through those daunting drapes out at those majestic peaks on occasion, unable to resist the glorious views surrounding us, but hidden from us). Notwithstanding the irony of our formal seating arrangement of row-upon-row, staring at backs of heads (mostly), we gathered to celebrate community.

I was not disappointed. Together, we explored our mutual faith through the spirituality of listening, the spirituality of learning, the spirituality of accompaniment, the spirituality of solidarity, the spirituality of meditation. We were encouraged to explore our world, our reality, our faith, our lives, through multiple perspectives, always open to those of others.

The phrase which leapt out at me most often over these days--more often than I could count--was "creation and history". This phrase encapsulates faith-life in my adopted home of El Salvador marvelously, inescapably. Those who come to my mind most vividly--those by whom I am surrounded, continuously--are not so much the pastors and the preachers, though they too play a significant role in bringing "creation and history" to life, but the environmentalists and the journalists. It is the environmentalists (too often protecting our water, air and earth from Canadian resource extraction interests) and the journalists who teach me tirelessly about "creation and history", ever-attuned to and immersed in these basic elements of life and faith, in spite of the inescapable risks they face.

As the study conference concluded, we heard about martyrdom. Martyrdom is a theme, a reality, a history, which keeps me in El Salvador. It is a theme which keeps me spiritually alive in El Salvador. It permeates the nation and the people of this mission which the ABT Synod has committed to continue supporting and learning from: "In Mission with El Salvador" / "En Misión con El Salvador". In this nation--as in neighbouring nations, especially in Honduras, but in so many others--it is the environmentalists and the journalists / human rights promoters--the "creation and history" people--who mostly comprise the ranks of the martyrs, along with some pastors and priests.

Last week I conversed at length, as I am often blessed to do, with a treasured friend, the son of two Lutheran martyrs of 8 years ago. <https://elcic.ca/News-Releases/2006-News-Releases/11072006.cfm>. Francisco and Jesús Carrillo were both pastors, but it was likely their focus on "creation and history" which led to their assassinations. With inspiring courage and

conviction, this son continues their ministry in their parish and town. Another Salvadoran martyr whom we ought not neglect is world-renowned Monseñor Romero, who, just days before our study conference, had been officially recognized by the Vatican as a martyr, as his people have recognized throughout these 35 years since his assassination. Romero's date of beatification is soon to be set. This month of March, the month after our study conference, the world of faith commemorates the 35th anniversary of his martyrdom and gives thanks for the gift which this witness, this reality, this "history", is to God's people, God's world.

A couple nights ago, as I spent the balmy night in my hammock gazing through the guava leaves at the fullness of the moon (well, I may have closed my eyes temporarily), I gave thanks for environmentalists, whose faith, vision and passion help sustain the beauty of God's creation for all of us to enjoy, that we may continue to be granted sustenance.

My primary reason for extending my stay in Alberta to take in this conference was to witness friends and colleagues from the ABT Synod interact with neighbours and colleagues from Canada's First Nations. From the time I first went to El Salvador in the 1980's, I have considered our ministry to be one of "reverse mission", experiencing faith from a Salvadoran perspective and learning from them, then passing this wisdom and wealth on to Canadians and others, in order to enrich and broaden and deepen our faith-lives and faith-responses. As Salvadoran Lutherans (and others) immerse themselves in responding to the plight of their neighbours, their nation, Canadians could be inspired by their example of faith and witness ("martyr" in Greek). These days together in God's awesome creation affirmed for me that this is indeed happening in our midst--perhaps, at least in part, thanks to the model offered by our Salvadoran sisters and brothers. Their faith calls them to be immersed in creation and history. Who more than our First Nations brothers and sisters are more immersed in creation and history, perhaps even called to help save Canada from itself, both environmentally and historically? Our ministry "In Mission with El Salvador" keeps us learning from our Salvadoran brothers and sisters. Their primary message to us is to stay alert to what we can learn from our own next-door neighbours, our own First Nations sisters and brothers.

In all cases, it will no doubt be God's Word to us all, God's witnesses, God's "martyrs", about God's creation for us all, God's history among us all.

Many thanks to all who made this Spirit-event, this faith-event, this community event, happen, and brought us all together to celebrate God's creation and history together.

To God be the glory.

Anticipating celebrating Romero's witness with brothers and sisters from the ABT Synod,

Brian

The Rev. Brian Rude, DD,

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