Rich Anglican Tradition

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October 31st is known as Reformation Day in the Lutheran and Reformed Traditions. To most in North America, this is simply Halloween where $8.4 Billion was spent on candy last year. However, October 31st this year marks 500 years since Martin Luther posted his 95 Thesis on the Wittenberg Cathedral door in Germany – the event that catalyzed the Protestant Reformation. There had been a split between the Eastern and Western Churches in 1054 CE but the explosion and shift in Europe in the mid-1500's left the Church changed forever!

The Church in England stood firm with the Pope for another 30 years. In fact, famed English King Henry VIII received the title "Defender of the Faith" from Pope Leo X – a subsidiary title British monarchs have held since – when he wrote against the Continental Reformers.

This alliance fell apart when Henry VIII appealed for an annulment from his first wife, widow of Henry's brother. Henry had appealed to the Pope for special dispensation to marry Catherine of Aragon but when she did not yield a male heir, he despaired that he had grieved God by having the Marriage Canons "modified" in order to marry his true love. The Pope did not grant the annulment for fear of Catherine's uncle Philip I of Spain… so Henry broke from Papal Authority and the Church of England was established. England also got back at Spain with the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588.

It should be noted that there had been a strong indigenous English Church even before Augustine, the 1st Archbishop of Canterbury, appointed by Pope Gregory the Great in the late 6th C. This is attested to by The Venerable Bede in his 7th C. "Ecclesiastical History of the English People." The Sarum Rite for Holy Communion, from the Diocese of Salisbury and the Solemnization of Marriage from the Diocese of York were among several elements brought together in the first English Book of Common Prayer by Archbishop Thomas Cranmer which pointed to the ancient roots of the British Church.

The Anglican Tradition stands in the rich Catholic Tradition as an ancient stream of the Church. It is one of the seven families of the Ancient Church that emerged around the Mediterranean. It is a sub-group of the Gallic Stream of the Church that settled in southern France, parts of Spain and Great Britain as a result of the Pax Romana, making trade and expansion of the Church easy throughout the Holy Roman Empire.

So… why the History Lesson? The Anglican Tradition has a rich history. Clergy and Laity alike have brought the Gospel to many lands and cultures over two millennia! While we face a season of challenge and decline in Canada and the West in general, we have relevant precedents in our corporate life from which we may draw. Also, there are places in the Anglican Communion currently that are outpacing Pentecostals and Evangelicals, seeing great growth.

I trust we can learn from history and contemporary expressions of the Church to see our Diocese prosper and advance the Gospel of the Kingdom of Jesus Christ here on Earth!