

# The Parish Broadside – St Peter’s Anglican Church

Lent Easter Pentecost 2010  
[www.stpeterfredericton.nb.ca](http://www.stpeterfredericton.nb.ca)

## What's Been Happening?

On Monday February 8 Fredericton City Council declared St Peter's Church a historic site. [St Peter's cemetery and St Peter's 1847 rectory will be declared so at a later date.] The occasion of this significant recognition was Black History month which is celebrated every year during the month of February. This long overdue acknowledgement of St. Peter's unique status and longstanding history was most welcomed. Not only is our church building 172 years old and as such the oldest worship site in the greater Fredericton area which has been in continuous use since its erection, but it was also a most suitable manner of marking, recognizing and celebrating the significant contributions of St Peter's Black members down through the years. Not only was a Leek the lead carpenter in the Church's construction, but the local Black community constituted as much as one third of the congregation from the 1840's well into the twentieth century. For generations not only did St Peter's black members faithfully attend worship and support their church but they also contributed significantly to the worship as members of its celebrated choir. Indeed, St Peter's was so well noted for its music in the late nineteenth century that the first Dean of Christ Church Cathedral, Dean Partridge, wished to be buried in St Peter's cemetery. His grave is found to the right of the entrance, situated such that the shadow of the Church cast by the declining sun passes over his grave lot.

Another notable burial in the cemetery is that of Captain Rainsford of the renowned 104<sup>th</sup> New Brunswick Regiment of Foot. It was this regiment, including Rainsford, that made the famous winter march from Fredericton to Quebec City in January of 1813. The Regiment fought with distinction against the American invaders at several battles the coming spring and summer thereby helping preserve Canadian freedom and independence.

It is the presence of such names as Leek and Rainsford, Payne and Quatermain, Henry and Murray, Lee and Taylor which make St Peter's cemetery a unique place and a valuable treasure both to the Parish and to the greater community.

## What's coming up this Lent?

The first Sunday in Lent 2010 will also be our Baden Powell Sunday. First Springhill Beavers, Cubs and Scouts will be coming to St Peter's fresh from their weekend event at Yoho Lake camp. We look forward to a good turnout as we welcome our helpers, known to us from our Shrove Tuesday Supper, to our weekly worship. It is hoped that the young gentlemen will assist by handing out the bulletins and reading the epistle that day. They may even add to our worship by singing a children's hymn – we await their contributions to our service expectantly.

February 21 will also be the first day of our 2010 Lenten Studies. Fr Hebb has decided on a somewhat different format this year, one which is designed to increase participation and sharing. The envisioned format will be that of a discussion group, modelled off the last Lambeth Conference's endaba procedure. Our topic for discussion will be "The Search for Authentic Christian Community." What Christian community is will first need to be discussed but will obviously have to do with "wherever two or three are gathered together in the name of our Lord." Sessions will examine New Testament examples and paradigms of community and what to make of them in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Sessions two and three will review sections of the Rule of St Benedict – the key document of western monasticism. Although monks and nuns are almost a thing of the past, this most successful and enduring form of Christian community must be mined for clues as to its success and possible hints of future applicability. Finally, our fourth session will examine more recent visions of community. These will include, but not be limited to, Anglican visions as expressed in the Prayer Book, (eg., Little Gidding), and the BAS, but also extend to a broader canvas to include the Iona Movement and even the L'Arche communities. All sessions will begin at 2:30 p.m. in the Parish Hall, 2385 Woodstock Road and all are welcome. Please come to listen, learn and share in a collective effort to come to terms with what Christian community can and might look like in our 21<sup>st</sup> century world.

## Fr Hebb's Address to City Council

Your worship, Mayor Woodside, council members, ladies and gentlemen. It is an honor to stand before you this evening on this important occasion. St Peter's Anglican Church, its surrounding cemetery and 1847 rectory are indeed historic sites, landmarks of cultural significance and testaments to the evolving social history of our province.

St Peter's is unique, a treasure – the only church building of its kind in the area. St Peter's is a house of prayer and has been in use as such for the past 172 years – the only church this can be said of in the entire greater Fredericton area. St Peter's is both a testament and a witness; a testament to the determination and the priorities of our ancestors in this place. It is a witness – a witness to the Faith of our forbearers, to those who valued matters of the Spirit above matters of this world, above things like consumerism and busyness. And so St Peter's actual physical presence represents hope and faith in an age of cynicism, doubt and despair. It is as if, to drive this point home, our past is speaking to us for St Peter's was actually built by the local Springhill Black population. The descendants of slaves from the former revolting American colonies, these folks could have slipped into despair and cynicism, but they did not. Rather, these brave souls eventually found freedom in this new land. Determined not to remain on the margins of Victorian society, these folks responded to the outreach of successive Anglican ministers and became members of the Established Church of England. When they encountered the occasional instance of bias due to the color of their skin they remained determined that "no one was going to keep them from THEIR Church." And so it is fitting that we pay tribute to their contributions here tonight.

To close, I wish to make two points. First, there is the need for a remedy – perhaps an easy one, only council will know. St Peter's cemetery contains many burials including the names of Rainsford and Duncan, and streets are named after these families, but the names of the black founders and members do not appear on a street index of Fredericton. Would it be

possible, that as there is a Howe Street there might also one day be a Leek and a Payne street in our part of the city?

Secondly, and more challenging, St Peter's, although a recognized historic site which is architecturally unique and culturally significant, is nonetheless in need of exterior repairs. Not surprisingly, a structure 172 years old needs more than an occasional coat of paint. I am not so naive as to ask the city for funds, but I do point out that the maintenance and preservation of our historic and cultural heritage costs money. If any council member, your worship, the mayor, city business or member of the public wish to support our present Exterior Restoration Project the assistance would be most welcome. I thank your worship and members of council for the opportunity of addressing you. Thank you!

### **Rector's Report on the year 2009**

The year 2009 was again a year of struggle and challenge for the Parish of St Peter, Fredericton. Sadly, average Sunday attendance fell again, although this time a mercifully slight drop from 54.61 souls per Sunday in 2008 to 52.57 in 2009. This drop of only two is markedly better than the precipitous decline of seven registered in the 2008 statistics when compared to 2007. However, when compared to just four years previously, Sunday worship attendance in 2009 is down from the 2005 level of 62.78 persons per average Sunday – a decline of 10 in just four years. As was the case in the rate of decline from 2007 to 2008, the difference cannot be attributed solely to deaths, moves or decreased mobility on behalf of our seniors. Folks who used to attend more faithfully have decreased in the regularity of their attendance. This is regrettable. Again the decline has a pronounced seasonality to it. Summer attendance last year reached historic lows. On both August 2 and August 16, only 29 people bothered to come out to worship – this was the combined attendance for both 8 a.m. and 11 a.m. services!

All however was not gloom at St Peter's in 2009. Winter, spring and autumn attendance was respectable. Sunday School soldiered on as did our ever-faithful ACW, organist and Choir. November witnessed five persons from our Parish confirmed by Archbishop Miller. Thanks to Betty Adams their photo appears in this month's *New Brunswick Anglican*. Three young persons from our Parish attended St Michael's Youth Conference in August as well. However, as Bishop Miller reminded us in

his sermon at confirmation, the youth at this age harbour both promise and experience much temptation and distraction. The general busyness of our society pulls them away from spiritual pursuits as does the many good extra-curricula activities they are involved in. Parents, priest and parish must be intentional and encouraging that the young are involved and engaged. Engagement as servers, sidesmen, Sunday school assistants and readers as well as participation in St Michael's youth conference are all offered. The lack of interest and engagement in establishing a youth group the other year only adds to the importance and urgency of these ongoing initiatives.

As well as our continuing challenges in the areas of attendance and offerings, 2010 will be a milestone year for the broader Canadian Church. General Synod, to be held in Halifax in June, will again deal with issues of human sexuality, especially the marriage of same-sex couples. Despite calls from the vast majority of the world-wide Anglican communion to halt movement in this direction, at least four Canadian dioceses have already proceeded with rites for the blessing of such unions. Whatever is or is not passed in Halifax, the disdain for Scripture and the unity of the Body of Christ is obvious. Agendas originating in our post-Christian society have high-jacked the Anglican Church of Canada and divided the body of Christ. The Anglican Church of Canada is clearly on a road which will lead it out of the fellowship of the Anglican Communion. This is intensely regrettable for it was the Canadian Church which sought the creation of the Communion in the first place through the Lambeth Conferences and contributed so much to its formation and development. More Canadian Anglicans will decide, as many already have, that staying with the Anglican Communion is more important than remaining in the Anglican Church of Canada.

Furthermore, let me be clear that the difficulty is not just the issue of the day, namely same-sex unions, but the entire decision making process of the Anglican Church in Canada. The difficulty exists on at least two levels. First, structurally we have synods wherein, contrary to the intent of their founders, votes are now taken on any aspect of liturgy, (services) discipline and doctrine. The notion is that a majority vote can determine these matters and that the majority is always correct. In short, a majority vote can determine what is true as well as what is right and what is wrong. Not only does this run contrary to common sense and the Articles of Religion ( XIX and XX, Prayer Book p 706), but it also posits (suggests) an infallibility on behalf of

synod majority voting which rivals that of the Roman Catholic doctrine of Papal infallibility. Secondly, there is the level of Scripture. We now live in a Church which despairs of finding the truth, the mind of Christ, in the pages of the Bible. The authority of the Bible has been so assailed, undermined and questioned for decades that the leadership of the Anglican Church in Canada despairs of finding any clear, compelling and convincing answers to its problems in the pages of Sacred Writ. I have witnessed prolonged discussions of the present disagreement with hardly any reference to Scripture by anyone in the debate. I can only conclude that Scripture has been despaired of as any sort of useful guide or source of truth. A denomination in such a state is an organization in profound disarray. I do not however propose literalism or fundamentalism as the way forward. Such apparently immediate solutions are also untrue to Scripture and are equally doomed to failure. The true way forward will involve decades of study, prayer and collective work. In such an impatient age, may God grant us the patience for the difficult task ahead.

All however is not doom and gloom. The crisis in Anglicanism and among Anglicans arises almost entirely in the western world – in England and North America. Elsewhere, the Church reads, studies, struggles with and believes Scripture *as an authority*. Yes, sometimes their answers come too easily and they too have much to learn, but the Church, the Anglican Church, believes, grows and prospers. Above all it has confidence in its God, its mission and its message.

Here at St Peter's we too are called by the same Triune God to be faithful Christians of the Anglican tradition. Here too we read the Scriptures, struggle with them and study them. We have the privilege to worship according to the traditional and Scripturally grounded *Book of Common Prayer*, (an option no longer available to many Canadian Anglicans), and we are called to be regular, faithful and yes, even disciplined in our worship. In this time we are perhaps above all challenged and encouraged to be confident, confident in our God, confident in the Faith we embrace and confident that His loving will, will indeed be accomplished in our lives, our little parish and our world. May we so pray here at St Peter's Anglican Church, Fredericton.

Under His continuing Mercy,

Rev Dr Ross N Hebb