

Rector' Report on 2006

The year 2007 is going to be another difficult year for the Anglican Church of Canada (ACC) as well as for the worldwide Anglican Communion of 77 million souls. Ever deepening divisions over issues of human sexuality will continue to make news. The public image and profile of our denomination will continue to be one of a fragmented, struggling and internally conflicted grouping of Christians. In Canada, General Synod of June 2007 will be the focus of attention, debate and conflict. Sadly, the bad public relations profile of the Anglican Communion will continue the following year with the Lambeth Conference of bishops slated for summer 2008. Who will be invited to that gathering of Anglican bishops, who won't be invited, who goes and who doesn't and what is and is not said and decided, and all the fall-out afterwards will constitute the Anglican news of 2008.

It is simply impossible to avoid or ignore the times in which we live, including the turmoil in our beloved Church. I for one get it pointed out to me and asked to comment every time there is 'news' – and this at Tim Horton's. I am forced to consider that everyone who attends St Peter's or those considering doing so also hear the same distressing coverage. The news is perceived by the public at large as being almost always negative and not the sort of thing which aids my feeble efforts at 'running' a 'successful' Parish. Thankfully, St Paul reminds us (1 Corinthians chapter 4/ Epistle for Advent 3) that what is required in stewards of God's mysteries is that "a man be found faithful," not successful. It is also noteworthy that a priest and rector is a steward of what belongs to another and a servant of the Lord above, not some human CEO.

So what of St Peter's in the midst of this confusion, bad PR and general time of transition? Last year saw only three funerals but nine baptisms. While 2007 has sadly commenced with an equal number of deaths,* overall, our statistics are a cause for encouragement. Gone are the days when children are 'done' due to parental or grandparent pressure. In the 21st century such pressures seldom exist and are a footnote of history and a tale to be told by retired, elderly clerics. Now families think, ask and come. They seek God's grace for their loved ones in the Sacrament of Regeneration - the Spirit is at work in their hearts and minds. This is surely a good thing. An encouraging number are turning to our Parish. We must be prepared.

To be prepared means at least two things. First, we are a known entity among the Anglican parishes of the city and a known quantity in the local community. We are doing things correctly and we are a stable, identifiable force. We must seek to remain known, stable and predictable. People are looking, in part, for such known Christian, stable entities. They know who and what we are and can join in on a Parish's life knowing what they are joining. This must continue.

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[* I would be amiss not to comment on this past, hectic and sad, week. This week revealed a very healthy and supportive parish in action. Drawn together by loss and grief the people of St Peter's rose to the occasion. The choir and organist were called upon for three funerals in the space of four days - not a complaint was heard. Many of these same ladies, assisted by many others, catered three post-service receptions in the same constricted period of time. Our volunteer church cleaner and sexton/snow-shoveler exhibited equal reliability and performance. While I am sure that I am aware of only a few of the acts of compassion and kindness which occurred, those alone assure me that the love of Christ is an active force in our little Parish. As one man assured me, "oh yes, it is a caring, supportive Parish community - they rise to the occasion and they do good!"]

We must also change with the times. Change in worship and music would be highly ill advised and counter-productive. These are elements of stability at St Peter's which attract people. They must continue. Anyone who wants different, new and changing can go to almost any other Parish and find it. However, changing with the times means identifying what we have that is unique and distinctive and proclaiming it to the world - and they will come. To this end we have embarked upon the erection of a Parish Website on the World Wide Web. This is a major step, a positive step and step in tune with the times and our emerging new demographic. It must continue and expand. Our face to the world which emphasizes what is unique at St Peters, the website is also a means of internal communication and potentially even of internal dialogue. The maintenance and improvement of a first rate site requires help. We need more write ups on aspects of parish life and we especially need many more images, digital photographs and images which are current and which encourage 'visits' to our site. Anyone with a camera (especially a digital one) can help and we ask for your help.

Other plans for this year include a new white marble floor in the sanctuary of St Peter's to be installed, hopefully, this June. This too comes under the heading of building on strengths and making our wonderful place of worship even more beautiful. Three donors have already pledged and the cost of the project is entirely covered without touching Parish funds whatsoever! Other and new approaches to fund management have begun to be discussed in light of changing times. A discussion on the possible erection of an arms-length Trust or Foundation which would support what we treasure and aim to perpetuate at St Peter's is also in order. Furthermore, new approaches to the stresses imposed on our limited volunteer labour reserve are needed. The time is simply past when work around or inside the Parish property gets done by *someone*. We are running very short of 'someones' and the faithful ones we have are tiring. I am amazed and amused by how often outsiders speak in a manner which reveals that they assume we employ a Parish secretary, a year round groundskeeper and a 24 hr, on call, property handyman. However, as you are well aware we do not. Nonetheless, one very promising development is coming this summer. We plan to paint some of the interior of the Parish Hall and in this and other matters look forward to increased levels of cooperation and liason between the Parish and the First Springhill Group Committee which represents our beaver, cub and scouting groups.

All these measures must not however distract us from our initial and primary purpose - the worship of the Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. As we are learning in the weekly Bible Study on the Revelation of St John, the divine, the goal of our spiritual journey is the kingdom of heaven where there, and there alone, we find final happiness and fulfillment in an activity which we share with the angels, namely, the worship of our God. All our efforts now are to be done in light of this final purpose and even now our greatest mission and most important activity is the worship of our God. Let us seek together to realize this goal in our hearts, our minds, our lives and collectively, in our little Parish of St Peter's here in Fredericton. May the God of love, bless us all.

In Christ,

Rev Dr R N Hebb

Priest/Rector