

## 2019 Rector's Report

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

One of the greatest gifts of being the rector of St. John's is having a great team to work with. The hard work done by Mary Robinson, both pastorally and administratively, is such a blessing to me, and to all of us. Darrell Jones too, is a joy to be around and we really appreciate his efforts to make sure the building is in good order and ready for groups and times of worship. Rev. John Galbraith has been very busy this year with his responsibilities with Camp Medley, but we so appreciate his contribution to our church family. I am so thankful for this team.

We also have a great team of Honorary Assistants. Rev. Canon Jon Lownds leads in our mid-week Eucharist and Bible Study and had a hand in leading in our music ministry and is constantly in prayer for us. Rev. Canon Bruce McKenna also has taken the lead in worship and has been busy visiting people and bringing Home Communion. Rev. Captain Charlie Smart has been in prayer for us and often shares words of encouragement with members of our family. This year we welcomed The Rev'd. David Peer and his wife Minna to the team. We are looking forward to our common ministry in the year to come.

The ministries of our lay people are so vital to the life of our church. I am thankful to our vestry, our wardens Donna and Don and our treasurer Ben. You have helped guide us through a full year that has had its stresses. We are saying goodbye to Don and Irene Adams in the Spring of 2020. Our loss will be St. Stephen's gain. You will both be missed. We are so thankful for the ways you have served God in and through our church family. God bless you!

Of course, we cannot forget the work of the Willing Wonders. Your vigilant efforts have made a huge impact on our church community. Thank you for your loving service. Thank you also to our chancel guild, and our lay readers for your ministry here and in the hospital.

We are very thankful for Mary Robinson for her years as Sunday School Superintendent. This Fall Lisa Stewart-Munn assumed this position and we would like to thank her and the Sunday school teachers for their ministry to our young people.

In 2019 we saw a shift take place in the music ministry of our church. Following the resignation of our music director, Alexandra Page, volunteers stepped up to share in the music ministry. I want to express my sincere appreciation for the leadership offered by Mary Lee McKenna, TC Ballard, Jon Lownds, Jack McGinley, Lisa Stewart-Munn, Pat Wilcox and Catherine McKenna for their regular leadership on Sundays. I'd like to thank the choir for their continuous ministry as well.

In many ways, 2019 has been spent focusing on our buildings. In particular, we have been consumed with the question, "What do we do with the Stone Church Building?" So before addressing that question I would like to recap what we have done in the past year. We have had several parish meetings, including a time with Dr. Nancy Matthis who guided us through a

process to identify alternate uses for the Stone Church building. From this meeting, a Stone Church Action team was formed. They met weekly in the Spring and submitted a report to the congregation in June. I would like to thank the Action Team for their efforts and for the useful information they provided as we discerned together. At our most recent meeting, held in October, we discussed this report, but as of yet we have not made any decisions regarding its future.

From the very beginning of this process I have urged us to seek unity in Christ. This unity is achieved when we all put the will of Jesus over and above our own. While I do not think we have achieved a consensus yet - I have been pleased with the overall tone of our conversations and the gentleness with which we have approached the issue. This is not an easy conversation, but I'm so thankful for the love we hold for each other.

Through our ongoing conversation we have learned a number of things:

- We learned that it would take somewhere between \$50, 000 and \$100, 000 just to restore the building to a state in which it would be safe for regular use;
- We learned that the Stone Building is not a national historic building and is not eligible for any grants to which we could apply to help cover any renovation or repair costs;
- We decided that the Stone Church Trust could not be accessed at this time even to save the building for fear of breaking that trust; and
- We have concluded that the only fitting purpose for the Stone Church building is that of a worship space. All other explored options failed to show viability.

There are two main opinions in our church regarding the Stone Church building. One believes that we must preserve the building. As Anglicans we value our sacred space. Our commitment to the Stone Church is an expression of love for past church members and a recognition of God's blessing us with a sacred space. The other opinion expressed questions the wisdom of putting any funds in a building that we have no need for. Given our strained financial situation our resources would be better used for the operation budget of our church, and on maintaining our newer building which will itself need upkeep in the near future.

A key challenge of using the Stone Church is the lack of parking on the south side of Main St. This, along with the current location of the bathroom in the basement, make the building inaccessible to users. Therefore, it is not enough to restore the building, it must be brought up to the standards set by our Diocesan Safe Church Policy, which means making it accessible to all. This means that the minimum payment of \$50,000-100,000 would just be the beginning to make the building truly usable.

So, what are we to do? Or perhaps, a better question is to ask is what is Jesus calling us to do? In seeking direction from our bishop in regarding this decision he shared his vision for the Diocese with me. His vision is to have a Diocese comprised of mission-focused parishes that are sustainable. To move in that direction this year we will be looking at forming a Mission Action Plan (MAP) for our parish. A MAP is a tool to help us identify needs in our community, and to

see how we can work to meet some of those needs in such a way as to express the love of Jesus practically.

We have already stumbled across a significant need. In editing this report, which originally was a parish letter, I came to the line which stated that each year we spend about \$6,000 in maintaining the Stone Church building. As I read that line, an inner voice asked, "I wonder how many kids go to school hungry every day across the street." I tried to ignore the voice, but it kept distracting my editing efforts until I heard "How far would \$ 6,000 go to feeding them?" I stopped editing, picked up the phone and called the principal to set up a meeting. I learned from this meeting that about 100 children go to school hungry every day. That's about a third of the school population. What is Jesus calling us to do?

On the 5th Sunday After Epiphany I preached from Isaiah 58:1-12. This passage talks about the kind of worship which is acceptable to the Lord. God wants more than ritual - he wants a heart of worship. Such a heart loves what God loves. It breaks over that which breaks the heart of God. It involves a God-focus and the intentional turning away from a self-focus. It is a movement away from that which I am comfortable with - to that which the Lord requires. In Isaiah 58:10 it says, "If you pour yourself out for the hungry and satisfy the desire of the afflicted, then shall your light rise in the darkness, and your gloom be like the noon day." (ESV)

Personally, I do not want to spend another year agonizing over what to do with a dearly loved building that requires repairs that we don't have money for and offers space that is no longer functional for our needs. I see no life in that. I do want us all to pour into the mission we have been called to in the Parish of Douglas and Nashwaaksis. I get excited when I see a real way in which we can break cycles of poverty. I become energized when I think about partnering with local churches and businesses to address this great need. I get giddy with the thought of building relationships with the kids of our neighbourhood, of seeing them succeed in school, and of sharing the love of Jesus with them in life-changing ways. I see a future in this. I see this as fulfilling what Jesus says that our good works can bring glory to God (Matthew 5:16).

It is time to get focused. I appreciate we cannot do that until we have a resolution with the Stone Church building. I believe we should gather in March 2020 to make a decision. In the weeks leading up to that meeting I want to encourage us all in our prayers. What would Jesus have us do with the resources we have, in the place we have been planted, amongst a community in need?

This is our decision to make. And if we decide to pour our resources into maintaining the stone church building, we will have the challenge of finding a source for income that will not detract from our operations budget. We will also need to come to terms with the amount of time and energy it will take for us to do this. If we decide to deconsecrate and demolish the Stone Church Building, then we will need to do so in a very sensitive way. We would need to ensure that we grieve well. We would also need to see if there were ways we could incorporate parts of the Stone Church building in our current structure. Or perhaps we could build a covered

memorial structure with benches in the vacated space. This decision would also involve time and money, and a thoughtful approach. The question is - what would Jesus have us do?

My hope for us all is that we do this together in the spirit of unity that glorifies Jesus in our common mission.

Respectfully Submitted,  
The Rev'd Paul Ranson - Rector

