

Rector's Annual Report (2010)
Parish of Christ Church

"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to God".

It could be the manifesto of the Parish of Christ Church, or so I would like to hope. Certainly Paul's words to the Colossians capture the recurring refrain of our many years together at Christ Church as priest and people. Indeed, it complements our Parish Mission statement: *"to be a visible witness, in the community of Windsor and beyond, to the good news of the Gospel of Jesus Christ as faithful stewards of the mysteries of God in Christ and in his body, the Church, according to the principles of our Anglican spiritual identity expressed in The Book of Common Prayer, The Ordinal, The Thirty-nine Articles and The Solemn Declaration of 1893"*. If our life as a Parish is not about worship, if it is not about *"the word of Christ dwell[ing] in [us] richly in all wisdom"*; if it is not about *"teaching and admonishing one another"* through the liturgy; if it is not about *"singing with grace in our hearts to God"*, then it is worth nothing.

The folly of our age and our culture, and the Church which has embraced them both, is that we have forgotten what the Church is. Paul's words speak profoundly to our confusions. He reminds us of what is primary. What do we worship? The question challenges us about our spiritual identity, something which cannot be measured simply in economic, social or political terms. Week in and week out, month after month, year after year, we have endeavoured to *"let the word of Christ dwell in [us] richly"*.

Simone Weil, in a powerful chapter from her book, *Waiting for God*, emphasises the importance of cultivating the art of paying attention which is nothing less, she suggests, than being alert to the truths that are being set before us and letting them take a hold of us. *"We do not obtain the most precious gifts by going in search of them but by waiting for them. Man cannot discover them by his own powers, and if he sets out to seek for them he will find in their place counterfeits of which he will be unable to discern the falsity."* Every little truth is part of the greater Truth of God. There are holy lessons for us in every part of our day. Learning how to wait on God is a kind of active waiting, like Mary, we might say, *"keeping all these things"* that were told her about the child Christ and *"pondering them in her heart"*. In other words, *"let[ting] the word of Christ dwell in [us] richly in all wisdom"*.

It is, we might say, the *unum necessarium*, the one thing necessary, and yet it runs completely counter to our tendency to become immersed in the practical and the day-to-day as if that were everything. *"Martha, Martha,"* Jesus says, *"you are anxious and troubled about many things; one thing is needful. Mary has chosen the better part which shall not be taken from her"* (Luke 10.41, 42). What is that one thing needful? It is worship, a worship that requires our attention and our willingness to learn. Everything else has to be subordinated to that task.

Along with the further and salutary lesson of learning from our mistakes, Simone Weil speaks of an important ethical dimension to our lives as learners. Our discipleship is about our learning, after all. The important ethical demand is a kind of empathy. In the first legend of the Holy Grail, she notes that the supreme question for one another is "*what are you going through?*" Love of neighbour is inseparable from our love of God. And it is a kind of miracle. It is really only possible through the love of God in us. "*The capacity to give ones attention to a sufferer is a very rare and difficult thing; it is almost a miracle; it is a miracle*". Why? Because it is a species of attention, a way of looking at one another and recognizing ourselves and Christ in one another, for that is our truth, the truth of our very being. It is about our life together in the body of Christ, "*let[ting] the word of Christ dwell in [us] richly in all wisdom*" and learning how to care for one another. Such is prayer signaled most powerfully in the biddings and intercessory prayers in our liturgy by which we attend to the needs of our world and day. How? Ultimately, by placing ourselves and one another with Christ.

It is, of course, a life-long task and it is not easy. There are obstacles and struggles. There are things that are beyond our control. That is a given, really. Our task here has been to confront our struggles and challenges honestly and prayerfully. And for that, I give praise and thanks to God for all of your support and care.

There are no magical solutions to the current problems that the wider Anglican Communion faces in its disarray nor to the immediate problems that we confront as a Parish. The only thing is *the one thing necessary* and that is the matter of what we worship, what we love. We are defined by our loves. And what we love will be shown in our commitments. It is as simple as that.

Our responsibility is to attend to the principles of our Faith and to act upon them. I wish that I could say that here is the blueprint and the plan to save the church but that would be dishonest (and presumptuous). There are no practical solutions to theoretical problems. The theoretical problem has altogether to do with the assumptions of our culture and age. The solution is in our attention to God in his Word and in his Church through which we may engage our culture and age.

It is not about change, apart from the constant *metanoia* of heart and mind, the change that belongs to repentance and renewal, the change that is about the constant conversion of our lives to God. No. The mantra of change has been the problem; change for the sake of change without any understanding of what it *is* that is being changed and to what end. What has been forgotten is the substantial being of the Church. There are always changes. The question is: what kind of change and for what end? The change which has been the folly of the last forty or more years in the churches has been about imitating the culture and the world at the expense of the purpose and being of the Church. We have failed to engage compassionately and theologically with the concerns and confusions of our world and day. We want easy answers. There aren't any.

The Anglican Communion

With respect to the presenting issues of the day that have caused such confusion and controversy in the Anglican Communion, namely, the matter of the blessings of same-sex unions and the ordination of practising 'homosexuals', the problem is not that there is a division of opinion about these questions but that there is a refusal to live with such divisions within the doctrinal principles that govern and define the being of the Church. Thus, under the guise of being 'pastoral' has come, willy-nilly, the demand to change the received doctrine of Christian marriage, among other things. There is the constant mantra of re-imagining God, re-imagining our humanity, re-imagining the Church, all codes words, really, for changing the doctrines that have been received and that have in them a great wisdom. It is really part of the "*rage to destroy*" that belongs to the culture of nihilism.

What drives the desire for change is not something primarily theological but anti-theological under the guise of something altogether sociological. Indeed, in Canada it has taken a lot of time and energy intellectually even to begin to recognize that the Church's role in these matters has to be primarily theological and yes, that there are theological principles at work and at stake in these questions and many others. In short, our problems are entirely spiritual and theological and yes, the spiritual and the theological are at the root of the problems of each and every parish and diocese, too.

There is a twofold problem with respect to such changes. The first is that there is no authority to do so within the structures of our polity in terms of doctrine and morality; the second is that there is a problem about the categories that are used to speak about our humanity, theologically, politically and socially. The revolutionary impulse has been to try to force changes to doctrine and discipline. This is what the bishops (some if not many), in what remains of the Anglican Churches in North America, have attempted to do, even in the face of the wider Communion (and the universal Church) and the somewhat reluctant but compelling admonitions of the Archbishop of Canterbury. But the revolutionary impulse is ultimately coercive; claiming to listen to diverse voices while pressing on with changes in matters over which no diocese or national church has authority, even according to their own foundational documents, such documents as *the Solemn Declaration of 1893* in Canada and as well the Constitutions of Diocesan Synods and National Churches. It is a mockery and a parody of the vaunted claim to inclusivity, all the while claiming autonomy. All in all, it is a great sadness.

And a great muddle. At best, a two-tiered Communion, it seems, since the North American churches appear determined to ignore the moratoria agreed upon by the Communion as a whole. This has resulted in a further fracturing of the Communion, since a number of Primates can no longer tolerate the blatant and arrogant hypocrisy of North American Episcopal double-speak. It remains unclear at this juncture where things will end.

We have, of course, as a Parish endorsed the Archbishop of Canterbury's Anglican Communion Covenant "*as a mechanism for maintaining the unity of the Anglican Communion, in accord with the foundational principles of our Anglican identity expressed in The Book of Common Prayer, The Ordinal, and The Thirty-nine Articles and as consistent with The Solemn Declaration of 1893 in Canada.*"

The endorsement speaks for itself and as a testament to the principles of our Anglican identity, regardless of what opinions we all may have about the presenting issues. At this point, for all its unwieldiness, one may hope that the Anglican Communion Covenant will provide some way for Anglicans to hold together in a respectful, faithful and theologically principled manner. I have to say that has been my primary concern in the face of all these confusions. And the only way that can happen is through a determined and principled faithfulness to the received principles that guide and define our Anglican identity even in the face of Episcopal and Synodical overreach. We are bound together by something more than the power politics of Synods and Bishops, whatever opinions on these questions we may happen to have. For my part, I have many, but they are completely irrelevant to my vows and to what defines my priestly identity.

In the long end of the day, the challenge of the Church is about a respectful way of dealing with the social and political *issues du jour* without making them the basis of the Church's identity and purpose. The Church has had a powerful and compassionate way of dealing with all manner of conditions - the good, the bad, the ugly and the confused - but only by way of her faithfulness to the basic categories of the theological understanding of our humanity and through the exercise of the pastoral ministry informed by doctrine. Those categories are the ones of Creation and Redemption and Sanctification and, like the revealed understanding of God as the Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Ghost, they are not negotiable. As a consequence, they have become subject to the projects of re-configuration and re-imagining by the advocates of revisionist theology.

In short, the advocacy culture triumphs, but at what cost? The politicization of what can best be described as "*a social construct*" is at the expense of the Gospel. The ontology of 'homosexuality', for instance, is a most dubious and uncertain concept, even to the point of being explicitly anathema to many so-called homosexuals, such as the Dutch advocate, Pim Pronk. People may choose to define themselves in any number of ways and according to any number of forms of association; it does not mean that there has to be a special liturgy for each and every social construct or particular characteristic. We don't have, at least not yet, the Liturgy of Ehud the left-handed or Teiresias the Transgendered, or, for that matter, the Liturgies of 'Bountiful' or 'Big Love'.

The confusions are great. It is not just that the Scriptures know nothing about sexual orientation (they don't), but that I am not sure anyone else does either. It is not even clear within the sexual politics of the advocacy culture just exactly what is meant by 'homosexual'. The terms homosexual and heterosexual are simply inadequate for the spiritual and theological understanding of our humanity. So why try to say that two

things are the same when they are not? Not to mention, why the rage and desire to re-define? For Anglicans, particularly, this constitutes a betrayal of the principle of doctrinal minimalism wonderfully expressed in a liturgy which understands that we are all sinners in constant need of Christ's redemptive grace. It is not only the institution of Christian marriage that is betrayed but also, sadly, the blessings of friendship and fellowship in the body of Christ, the Church.

At issue is a profounder question for our age and for the western democracies in general. It is the loss of an understanding of institutions in their integrity and truth as well as the failure of institutions to live from their guiding and foundational principles. There have been lots and lots of changes in the long history of the Church. The ones that have succeeded are the ones that are respectfully and clearly related to the creedal and scriptural doctrines that explicitly govern the institutional expressions of the Church's life and being.

Some areas of disagreement and division, such as the questions about women's ordination, are matters that, in principle, are provisional, as the more astute women theologians and ecclesiastical politicians, like the Rev'd Alyson Barnett-Cowan, readily acknowledge (and did so at the 30th Atlantic Theological Conference in Moncton, this past Spring). And as such, there can be respectful and responsible ways of dealing with what might be, with apologies to T.S. Eliot, "*[the doing] of the right deed for the wrong reason*", which also happens to be "*the greatest treason*" (T.S. Eliot, *Murder in the Cathedral*), but without coercion. For barring a General Ecumenical Council of all the Churches, which remains, unfortunately, as unlikely a scenario as peace in the Middle East, some questions can only be provisional. Incidentally, it was certain 17th century Anglican Divines, such as John Pearson and John Bramhall, who hoped and argued for the possibilities of such a Council. Again, we come back to the primacy of theology.

Other matters, such as the presenting issues that so convulse and confuse the Anglican Communion, are far less clear and belong more concretely to what some, theologically speaking, myself included, are forced to say constitute a form of serious moral error, precisely because the demands for change in these cases involve a rejection of the larger *consensus fidelium*, not only on moral doctrine but on the matters of creedal or essential doctrine upon which the moral doctrines depend. Once again, we come back to the primacy of theology with respect to all and any forms of the Church's reform and renewal.

Reform and renewal are part and parcel of the life of the Church. One may say historically that there has been no reform or renewal of the Church that has not been grounded in the essential doctrines of the Church. The failure in our current situation has been the inability to provide coherent theological justification for changes in polity and morality that are consistent with the basic creedal principles of the Christian faith. The revolutionary impulses are iconoclastic and destructive. We live in the ruins of their iconoclastic rage.

It is not the first time. Yet, this is where we must learn to pray and think.

The Parish

It has been, yet again, another tremendously busy and momentous year for the Parish. The sale of the Rectory was a necessary practical step and one which was taken as a prudential matter for the sake of the long-term life of the Parish. It does not mean that we don't face money problems, the same money problems that have dogged the life of the Parish and the wider Church for a very long time. We reached a plateau in terms of committed givings a number of years ago and in the meantime expenses have continued to rise.

The burdens of property are always with us but such things are to be seen as belonging to our witness. We do not worship the buildings but the God to whom they point us and with whom they place us. It is an important feature of the Christian faith. The things of the body belong to the spirit. It is part and parcel of our Maritime Anglican heritage and as a witness to the Doctrine of the Incarnation.

Our challenge is to persevere and to find creative, honest and responsible ways to maintain what belongs to our life and mission where we are placed.

There are a considerable number of highlights to the year. Along with the sale of the Rectory, we managed another winter in the Hall, again demonstrating good stewardship. We hosted the Good Friday ecumenical service for the Windsor Churches; a bit of a theological work-out, to be sure, and probably *de trop*, altogether too much. In the Spring, the King's College Choir visited the School and the Parish as part of their tour to the States. In the Fall, we had a glorious celebration of our having achieved provincial heritage recognition, again with the King's College Choir providing the music, and with Fr. Gary Thorne as the special preacher. We have maintained programmes of education such as the *Christ Church Book Club* and the *Cinema Paradiso* movie nights' initiatives. We contributed to the Diocese and the Bishops' Appeal (\$ 5,000.00 each) out of our sense of commitment, where possible financially, to the work and life of the wider church, though without jeopardy to the Parish's existence as a corporation. Nothing has changed, unfortunately, with respect to the '*tensions*', so to speak, between the Diocese and us.

We undertook major work on roofs, foundations, sewer and furnace pipes; all things which belong to due diligence and prudential care. In every way, it is about trying to do what we can so as to provide for the possibilities of a future.

Thanks to Bev and Jacoba Morash, two stained glass windows, locally executed, were installed in the Hall, our winter Chapel! They add to the churchly ambience of the Hall quite nicely. For such things we should be truly grateful.

I have continued to be quite busy, perhaps, dare I say, too much so, or at least, so I am constantly being told! I have published a couple of articles in *The Anglican Planet*, one on the "*Roman Covenant*", dealing with the provisions made by the Roman Catholic Church to receive Anglicans who have become utterly disenchanted with the Anglican

Communion; another on "*Post-Secularism: the Good, the Bad and the Ugly*", that points out that the assumptions of "*Secularism*" embraced by western culture and the churches, have utterly failed, and that there is now a kind of resurgence of religion in the global world.

I gave a paper at the 30th anniversary of the Atlantic Theological Conference, held this past spring in Moncton on *Matters Essential & Indifferent in late 17th and early 18th Century English Theology*; it will be published this spring.

I preached at King's College Chapel in Halifax and at St. George's, Halifax on certain special occasions and I gave two lectures and seminars at the *Atlantic School of Theology* to the Anglican Foundation class. I also lectured and preached at Trinity Church, Saint John, New Brunswick, on the occasion of the 225th anniversary of the Loyalist foundation of that city. I also led a quiet day for a society of priests (SSC) in Sackville, New Brunswick. A summer newsletter was produced as well as a booklet, *Iconoclasm or Idolatry? Neither!*, which was printed for the heritage celebration of the Parish in September 2010. Thanks to Scott and Judy Gilbreath, we have a website which is second to none. The artwork assembled with the various Saints' Day commemorations attracts a steady stream of visitors to the site. That, along with other things, perhaps, makes it an important part of our Parish witness.

I continue to teach at King's-Edgehill School which allows me to contribute to the Parish in a variety of different ways as well, all in accord with *the Covenant of Ministry* between me and the Parish which was ratified last year at our annual meeting. This, too, is an important part of our Parish mission.

We have continued our work with the Deaf Community through our association with the Atlantic Ministry of the Deaf and I am grateful to the interpreters, Nicole Veinotte and Mary Cunningham for their dedicated service, and to Aggie Langille and Helen Gibson who are so faithful and committed to providing hospitality for this aspect of our Parish outreach.

One special development this year was the inauguration of a prayer partnership with the Parish of St. Matthew's, Tisdale, in Northern Saskatchewan where the newly priested Fr. Gethin Edwards is the rector. This is an important part of our spiritual lives and is particularly crucial at a time when it is all too easy to get down on ourselves and lose sight of the nature of our Christian fellowship and support of one another through prayer. Please pray for the people of that Parish and area of the Canadian Church.

I would be remiss if I didn't thank all who have continued to persevere in our common work together. I am particularly grateful to our new warden, Alex Jurgens, for his excellent and sound advice and guidance; to Barbara Hughes for her constant and splendid suggestions; to Rod Kershaw, our Treasurer, who despite being laid up managed to do more than yeoman's service with the books (and the lobsters); to June, his wife, who played, I am sure, more than small role in her husband's continuing recovery; to Judy and Scott Gilbreath for their commitment and support; to the whole Parish Council for their steadfastness and patient persistence so necessary in staying the

course! I am indebted, as we all are, to the hard, hard work undertaken on behalf of the Parish by our financial advisor, Mr. Trevor Hughes.

I am most grateful to Aggie Langille and Helen Gibson for their tireless efforts in providing hospitality for our continuing work with the deaf community. I thank Brain and Teena Balding for their attention to our little foodbank and for their support in so many other things. Thanks, too, to their splendid daughters, Brittany and Megan for their willingness to serve. While we have not had a Sunday School this year, I am grateful to the extended Oulton clan and the Kelley clan for their support and interest, especially at the Children's Christmas Crèche Service.

I wish to thank Emma and John DeVenney for their commitment to the bi-annual Newfoundland and Country Evening of Musical Entertainment and to the Seniors' Drop-In, and to Eric Nott, for yet another Parish Talent and Variety Show! My thanks to the Men's Club for their fellowship and work, both their decorative labours at Thanksgiving and Christmas and their culinary labours with respect to the Shrove Tuesday Pancake Supper. My thanks to Pam McKay-Edgecombe, Diana Oulton, Tannis Jurgens, Gail Denman and so many, many others for their work at the Ham Supper and the Lobster Supper; fund-raising events, to be sure, but events which also generate good-will and fellowship and indicate a measure of strong support for the Parish in the wider community.

I am most grateful to Aggie Langille, Muriel Fraser, Jacoba Morash and Elizabeth Spurr for their tireless and faithful devotion to preparing the Sanctuary for worship and to Bev Morash for his deep devotion and commitment to the life of the Parish as Sexton and Layreader. My heartfelt thanks to the Choir for their patience, goodwill and perseverance. I am grateful, as well, to the wonderful skill and talent of our organist, Mr. Owen Stephens, who does such a superb job in complementing the theological thrust of our worship with such well-chosen music and expertise.

My thanks as well to my family, especially to my wife, Marilyn, long-suffering as always, and to my children, though spread afar, who retain an affection and a connection to the Parish. I am particularly grateful to Madeleine, who when home with us at Advent and Christmas, contributed, nay, stole the show at the dramatic presentation of Dorothy L. Sayers "A Man Born To Be King". Such things gladden a father's heart. Joel, much further away teaching in Taiwan, continues to encourage and inspire.

We are truly blessed and in ways, I fear, that we do not always appreciate. There is something about an annual report that helps us, perhaps, to put things in perspective.

Looking ahead, I want to mention first, an additional event. At the request (read command) of our other daughter, Elizabeth, I will be conducting a quiet day in early Lent, Saturday, March 19th, 2011, at King's-Edgehill School under the auspices of the Prayer Book Society of Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island. It will involve a series of meditations build around the services of Morning Prayer, Holy Communion and Evening Prayer. The meditations will be based on St. Bonaventure's *Itinerarium Mentis*

in Deum, "The Journey of the Mind into God". The cost, which includes lunch and refreshments, is \$ 10.00. Please contact me if you are interested.

I also want to announce that there will be an Episcopal visit to the Parish on April 3rd, 2011. The Suffragan Bishop, the Rt. Rev'd Ron Cutler, will be with us on *the Fourth Sunday in Lent*, just before Passiontide, for a service of Communion and Confirmation at 10:30am. The students who were prepared for Confirmation two years ago (and subsequently) will be presented for Confirmation at that time. This rare and special event will be followed by a time of fellowship and refreshment in the Parish Hall. This is his first official visit to the Parish.

May God continue to bless us all in the year ahead.

In the mercies of Christ,

Fr. David Curry
February 6th, 2011