

Rector's Annual Report (2011)
Parish of Christ Church

"Master, carest thou not that we perish?"

Winter. Storms of snow and icy rain. Cold and dark. And always, it seems in the Maritimes, most capricious – changeable and inconstant. More than a season in the course of nature's year, winter has a profound hold on our minds and imaginations. There are, after all, the winter storms of our souls and culture, and the winter of our lives, too, whether individually or collectively as a Parish. In short, winter challenges us.

Winter challenges us most especially about faith and commitment. There is no getting around it. Winter confronts us with death. How we face winter is about how we face death. And that in turn is always about how we live. Death and resurrection are the governing images for the Christian understanding of our living and our dying. In the Gospel story for *the Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany*, which ends the Epiphany season this year and which we heard last week, Jesus is with us in a sea-storm. In the face of the storm and in the fear of death, the sailors awaken him with this question, "Master" – 'Teacher' more precisely – "*carest thou not that we perish?*" There is the sense that one should not be indifferent in the face of death. Join us, they seem to be saying, in our fearful fatalism about our impending doom. But instead of being another voice in the tragic chorus, Jesus arises and rebukes the wind and bids the sea be still. A miracle, to be sure.

The miracles of the Gospel recall us to the greater miracles of Creation and Redemption. Such is Epiphany's theme. God's creative and redemptive purpose is made known in concentrated ways in the person of Jesus Christ. The sailors' fear turns to a philosophical or religious fear, namely, a sense of awe and wonder at Jesus. "*What manner of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?*" Epiphany in a question, we might say. Jesus is *God with us* and that makes all the difference in terms of how we face death. And it makes all the difference with respect to the labours of our lives, too, as we see in the Gospel story for *Septuagesima*. The grace of God sustains and supports us. Grace is God's good will and purpose for us. When we forget that we are most in peril.

We are dying. It is the simple truth of our Christian lives. For unless we are dying we are not living. It is the simple truth of Christian baptism. Unless we are dying to ourselves we are not living for God and for one another. Death and resurrection. How then are we dying? With dignity? The phrase, 'dying with dignity', I am afraid, has pressed into the service of other agendas. Dying graciously, however, is about being defined by the grace of God. "*Grace is everywhere*", as Bernanos puts it in *A Diary of a Country Priest*.

God's grace is what sustains us and keeps us going, I believe. God's grace is the true meaning of the miracle of Creation and Redemption. Grace is about God's care for us, a

care that challenges us with respect to our fears and anxieties and about our responsibilities and commitments. It has been another year of grace at Christ Church.

The challenges continue, of course. There is no point in pretending that it has been an easy year and yet, the miracle continues. We have managed to complete the year in terms of operations with a modest surplus that allowed us to contribute \$ 5,000.00 to the work of the wider church. We have had, however, large capital expenses with respect to roofs. But that is all part of our purpose and sense of mission. The Church roof on the King Street side of the Church was done and the Clerestory roof on the Hall side was also completed. There was, as well, the removal of almost a ton of pigeon droppings from the Bell Tower, and the erection of wire netting to keep them out of the Tower for the future (we hope). Like the roofing of the clerestory roof, this was not part of the original plan but was work which had to be done. The good news, or at least so we hope, is that the steep part of the Church roof on the Hall side will not need to be done in this fiscal year.

Our challenge is to avoid drawing on capital and interest from the Foundation. Overall, offerings have stayed fairly stable, though there are the ups and downs of the special offerings from one year to the next. The relative stability of committed givings is testimony to the commitment to persevere as well as to an incredible generosity of spirit, particularly by some.

We embarked upon a communication strategy that involved the production of several newsletters, a bulk mailing to the wider community and the beginnings of a digital "*friends of Christ Church*" mail-out. While it is not always easy to gauge the effects of such things, overall I think that they are important and worthwhile continuing to some extent or other. They cost, of course. I am grateful to Sheila Brisco for her labours with respect to the mail-outs. It is a constant work in progress.

While our committed givings have remained relatively stable, costs continue to mount, especially with respect to oil and electricity. I would remind you that it was only six years ago that we broke free from the years of the Parish being run on overdrafts of \$30,000.00 - \$40,000.00 per annum. That is part of what I mean when I say the miracle continues.

There is a crisis in the volunteer sector of contemporary society in Canada and particularly in the Maritimes, especially in the more rural parts. There is the demographic decline - out-migration and an aging population - coupled with the pressures and demands on younger families who depend on double-income. Volunteer Fire Departments, Legion Halls, Historical Societies, Community service groups of one sort or another are all in crisis mode because of a precipitous decline in volunteers. Even Towns and Municipalities are in disarray. The Churches, too, are under distress, particularly the rural and small town ministries which cannot easily sustain themselves let alone meet external demands. Diocesan policies and practices continue to compromise the corporate integrity and the very being of Parishes. Christ Church continues to withstand such things and to persevere, firmly and graciously, I trust.

These are all the winter-storms which confront us and challenge us. They challenge us about what we can do by the grace of God in the situations in which we are placed.

It is not that we just soldier grimly on. No. We carry on with good faith and vigour to the best of our abilities. There is no good to be found in pointing fingers of blame at one another because things are difficult and there is no point either in despairing and giving up. Living or dying, we must do it with grace and with a view towards those who come after us. There are the signs of a growing interest and respect for religion, especially in what is now recognized as a post-secular world. What that will mean for the future of the Church, and, more particularly, the Parish, remains to be seen. I do think the challenge for us is to do everything in our power to see that something remains. Churches exist in our communities not primarily for any useful or practical good but for the glory of God and for the sacrificial service and commitment that arises from our love of God.

There have been a number of high points to the year. There were special services and events which were well received and served to give profile to Christ Church. The King's Chorale concert in the spring and the 400th Anniversary celebration of the King James Bible in the Fall were two such splendid events. They gave great encouragement to many. Along with special events such as those which bring people in from all over, there is the continuing miracle of our regular patterns of worship, both on Sundays and on week-days. It amazes me that there is always a congregation for the holy-day services during the week. It is part and parcel of the Parish's life of prayer. The Christmas Eve service was particularly well-attended this year and with many younger people. Therein lies the paradox of the parish. We have a goodly number of younger families with young people. They want and expect the Church to be there but, as they tell me, they are totally caught up in other things on Sunday mornings related to their children's interests, mostly, it has to be said, sports' commitments.

Perhaps it is a failing on my part but I don't know what to do about it. I am wondering if there are other times and different kinds of events such as a monthly worship service (short) followed by a meal and some form of light instruction for families. I am not quite sure. But it is something worth thinking about, perhaps.

The Book Club has continued apace with a small group of dedicated readers, not unlike the dedication of those who attend the week-day services. All in all, the year has been a mix of special events and regular services.

One new venture was our hosting the 84th Highland Regiment's annual banquet. Thanks to Mike and Diane Oulton, and to Katherine MacLean and to many others who helped out, we served a roast beef dinner. Much thanks to Pam MacKay-Edgecombe who so kindly donated her cleaning service as well as helping out herself, though ill. Along with the annual Lobster Supper and Ham Dinner and Shrove Tuesday Pancake Supper, these events contributed to the life and finances of the parish. The Newfoundland and Country Evenings have continued apace and are well appreciated by those who come from far and wide. My thanks especially to Emma and John

Devenney for their work in organizing those events and to Moira Burgess' help in the kitchen along with Jacoba Morash, Aggie Langille and Helen Gibson. The Annual Parish Talent and Variety show which we had not intended on having this year occurred by popular demand! And so on it goes. These are a few of the many ways in which the Parish exists and lives beyond itself. The Seniors' Drop-in during the Spring and Fall provides a much needed social occasion for some in our communities and my thanks to Judy Gilbreath and to Emma Devenney for shouldering the responsibility for that aspect of our outreach.

At the suggestion of Katherine MacLean, we are undertaking to provide food offerings to *Harvest House* rather than running the little food bank out of the Hall. I think this is something which needs to be supported and I hope that in 2012 we can think seriously and give generously by way of canned and dried goods for Harvest House here in Windsor.

Another venture embarked upon in 2011 was the *Christ Church Concert Series*. There were two outstanding concerts in the Church; one in September and the other in December. Two more are scheduled for April and June. My thanks for the hard work and musical labours and talents of our organist, Mr. Owen Stephens, who got this concert series up and running. My hope is that it will become an annual series of about four concerts.

I would be remiss not to thank Owen and the Choir for their faithfulness and commitment to the liturgy. What our small choir is able to do is itself a kind of miracle. Our sexton and layreader, Bev Morash, gave us all a moment of worry, having fallen because a ladder collapsed under him and sustaining some very painful injuries. It did mean post-poning a trip to Holland. I am not sure if the pain out-weighed the gain in *his* mind but under Jacoba's vigilance and care, Bev is back to duties - just no ladders! My thanks to Scotty for stepping in with respect to some of Bev's lay-reading duties and my thanks to Jacoba and the Men's Club for helping out with the maintenance aspects of the Church and Hall during Bev's convalescence. Now if we can just find a way to keep Jacoba off ladders!

The Men's Club continues to provide yeoman service in many ways. My thanks to Brian Balding for his many talents and service and to Ken McBrine, Scotty Cameron, Eric Nott, Bill Mills, Herb Phillips, Alex Jurgens, Bev Morash, Rod Kershaw, Darrell Beaver and Emerson Hall. We miss from our ranks, Jim Wilcox, who is not able to get out very easily any longer.

The Ladies of the Parish continue to provide faithful service especially in matters of hospitality. My thanks as always to some of the great Mothers of the Parish (there are several of them!), Aggie Langille and Helen Gibson, for their work in providing a luncheon for the Atlantic Ministry for the Deaf following the monthly service at Christ Church. This, too, is all part of our outreach and mission. The Ladies of the Parish all came to the fore in splendid fashion for the 84th Highland Regiment Banquet, for the

feeding of the King's Chorale, and for the reception on the occasion of the special service marking the 400th anniversary of the King James Bible.

Another miracle of the Parish concerns the faithfulness of the Sanctuary Guild in setting up and preparing the altar and sanctuary for worship. Dedicated and disciplined, they always have things in hand. My thanks to Aggie Langille, to Muriel Fraser and to Jacoba Morash as well as to the honorary member of the Sanctuary Guild, Bev. Their labours, I fear, often go unmentioned.

We have a prayer partner with a Parish in Saskatchewan, St. Matthew's in Tisdale. I hope to find a way to bring news of their affairs more regularly into our services by way of the bulletin. At the moment they do not have a website and that has limited things somewhat.

My thanks to Scott and Judy Gilbreath for maintaining and running our Parish Website. This, too, is one of the major forms of our outreach and mission. It is regularly viewed by others outside the Parish and the Diocese and, for that matter, outside the country.

The Parish Council is to be commended for their steadfastness and commitment. I am most grateful to the financial wizardry of Rod Kershaw, our Treasurer, to the solid and splendid advice and counsel of Alex Jurgens, our warden, to the continuing support and concern for the Parish of John and Pam Edgecombe, and to Trevor Hughes, whose sense and sensibility continue to provide strong guidance. Barbara Hughes, who has been such a strong counsel and support for the Parish for so many years, resigned from the Council last spring for health reasons but continues to be a force and a presence for the good as does Eric Nott, our other honorary warden. My thanks to them both for the many, many times in which they have given such sage advice and counsel.

Beth McBrine, our secretary, has been tied up with family concerns and at this time is no longer able to serve on Parish Council. I want to thank her for her commitment and labours over many years and hope that she will be able to return to the Council when time permits.

To the other members of the Council, my heartfelt thanks and appreciation. The challenges for small institutions that are neither government nor business are simply great. They come down to faith and commitment. The challenge which lies before us as a Parish is about the spirit to persevere in good faith and with grace and charity even in the face of the storms of adversity.

The year 2012 marks two very special anniversaries for Anglicans. It is the 350th anniversary of *the 1662 Book of Common Prayer*, the mother book, you might say, of all the classical Prayer Books of the Anglican Communion and the book which contributed so greatly to the shape and structure of the English language all over the world. The Prayer Book Society in England has produced *The Book of Common Prayer: Past, Present and Future* which contains a number of essays about various features of the Book of Common Prayer, including an article by P.D. James, the noted British detective fiction

novelist. The book is available for purchase at www.amazon.ca for \$ 15. 85 and, as well, at www.chapters.indigo.ca.

It is also the 50th anniversary of the 1962 *Canadian Book of Common Prayer*, the only post World War II Book of Common Prayer that stands self-consciously within the doctrinal structure of the classical Books of Common Prayer. My hope is that we can host at least one special choral evensong to mark these special milestones in the life of the Anglican Church. They are reminders to us of our spiritual legacy. They are themselves a kind of miracle through which the miracles of grace have been conveyed to us.

The Archbishop of Canterbury in his 2011 Christmas Sermon, speaking about the 1662 Book of Common Prayer, noted that it is *"a book that defined what a whole society said to God together,"* providing *"a source of vision for an entire society."* It is *"a treasury of words and phrases that are still for countless English-speaking people the nearest you can come to an adequate language for the mysteries of faith. It gives us words that say where and who we are before God"*. *"We're much the poorer,"* he suggests, *"for forgetting it and pushing it to the margins as much as we often do in the Church. And it is crucial to remember the point about the Prayer Book as something for a whole society, binding together our obligations to God and to one another, in a dense interweaving of love and duty joyfully performed."*

"The coming year's celebration is not a museum piece," because the Prayer Book, if used thoughtfully and prayerfully in worship, teaches us *"how to join up,"* what the Archbishop called, *"the muddle of [our] experience in a coherent pattern by relating it to the unchanging truth and grace of God."* It is our constant struggle to let God's grace, proclaimed and celebrated, define us. For *"once the word is spoken in the world, there is no way back. Your response to it, says the gospel again and again, is what shows who and what you really are, what is deepest in you, what means most;"* in short, the love that is the weight of your being. I pray that we may be worthy of the spiritual legacy that defines our Anglican Christian identity. In a way, it is precisely about living and dying graciously. And all because of the Master-Teacher who does care for us, the one whom even the wind and the sea obey. And so must we.

(Rev'd) David Curry
January 30th, 2012