



Area Bishop's Letter to Vestries of Trent Durham

Candlemas February 2, 2017

Dear Friends in Christ ~grace to you and peace this day.

Thank You all for your prayers and understanding, as my family and I have just undertaken to relocate our home to your episcopal area. We now live in Whitby! We look forward to settling in and discovering (again) the beautiful & diverse Trent Durham Area.

I offer my prayers and best wishes as you gather for your annual Vestry meetings, and I thank all of you for your vision and work in fulfilling the mission of Christ. I especially thank Bishop Patrick White for his episcopal leadership in the interim period, and Bishop Linda Nicholls for her years of leadership and innovative ministry here in Trent Durham. We welcome Gwen Humphreys as our new Administrative Assistant in the Trent Durham office. Please be patient and kind to both of us as we learn together our new roles.

It is with deep gratitude that I extend my Thanks to all retiring members of Vestry. Your labours and energy well spent have been to the Glory of God, and to the up-building of the reign of Christ here on earth. May you enjoy your new-found "free time," and be encouraged to continue to share your wisdom, insights and experience with your parish, who need your presence now more than ever as we work to do the business of Christ together.

Thank You to the faithful and dedicated clergy and laity of Trent Durham. A word of welcome and appreciation to those who are newly undertaking positions of leadership and responsibility. Your service will be a blessing to God and to all of us mere mortals. Be strong and steady, knowing that you are doing a good work. Joshua 1.9 *"Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go."*

This is a time to be courageous as the body of Christ in the world. Our ways of doing church together are evolving – there will be change & challenge & growth & new development over the next year as we are engaged in responding to needs and anticipating together where new opportunities to share the Gospel will be. Resilience and creativity are most commendable, and I assure you of my support in all that you do.

This is an exciting time in the life of our Diocese, as we have adopted a new strategic plan that sets out the direction of our work over the next five years. It is titled **Growing in Christ**, and identifies five focus areas for our attention as a Diocese:

1. identifying and raising up leadership both lay and clergy
2. building a culture of trust
3. strengthening our stewardship of resources, both people and property
4. encouraging innovation based on good evidence
5. simplifying our governance structures

The Right Reverend
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I invite and encourage the clergy and people of Trent Durham to embrace this plan and especially, to join in living into all that is hoped for in this plan. The plan is a revamping of what we have been doing and intentionally giving clarity to how we are going to work together as a diocese.

A word to strongly encourage your Vestries to pass the Social Justice Vestry Motion: The 2017 Vestry motion again focuses on addressing Calls to Action of the TRC by encouraging parishes to carry out reflection and study within their congregations as well as calling on the government to implement one of the key elements of the TRC's calls. We hope that your parish will join in undertaking this work by passing the motion and committing to continue working towards reconciliation at every level of the church and in all parts of the country. As an Ambassador for Reconciliation for our Diocese, this area is close to my heart. As citizens of this great nation, we all together have responsibility to undertake the righting-of-relationships with our First Nations, Inuit and Métis sisters and brothers, with each and all who inhabit this land, wild creatures and even with the land itself. *"All creatures of our God and King, lift up your voices, let us sing: Alleluia, Alleluia!"*

In July 2016, our General Synod approved the first step to amend the Marriage Canon to formally permit same-sex marriages in the church. Over the next three years, further consultation about this will take place in all our dioceses in the Anglican Church of Canada as we prepare for a second reading at General Synod in 2019. I am acutely aware that for some of our sisters and brothers in Christ, it is an affirmation of who they are and their rightful place in the life and work of the church. I am equally aware that because of General Synod's action, some of our sisters and brothers in Christ in our church are upset, hurt and still uncertain about their future in the church.

I echo what has been said by our Primate Archbishop Fred Hiltz and our Diocesan Bishop and Metropolitan Archbishop Colin Johnson that **there is a place for everyone** in the Anglican Church of Canada. Archbishop Johnson continues a dialogue with clergy and laity that do not support General Synod's action. I share the view that ALL of us are God's beloved children, and that all of us have a place in God's kingdom and are invited to fully participate in the mission that God has placed before us. It is a priority for me to engage in dialogue with clergy and laity of Trent Durham who are interested in discussing a way forward.

Archbishop Johnson in his Vestry letter said, "All of us together need to extend to each other the most generous Christian charity that our Redeemer calls us to exercise as we seek to discern and live out God's will."

In the words of Bishop Peter Fenty, "We are a people of faith, hope and confidence in a loving, gracious and merciful God. Our roles as Christians today are to continue bearing witness to that love, hope, graciousness and mercy offered us by Almighty God every day. We must continue the missional-work that is before us, in building communities of compassion and hope."

This year marks the 500th Anniversary of the Reformation. The Archbishops of Canterbury and York, Justin Welby and John Sentamu in marking the beginning of Christian Unity week and the anniversary of the Reformation, issued a statement ~ I quote a paragraph from them, on which I ask you to ponder:

“Remembering the Reformation should bring us back to what the Reformers wanted to put at the centre of every person's life, which is a simple trust in Jesus Christ. This year is a time to renew our faith in Christ and in Him alone. With this confidence we shall then be ready to ask hard questions about those things in our lives and the life of our churches that get in the way of sharing and celebrating faith in Him.”

We give thanks to God for the ministries of those who are working to model unity in their communities. We pray God's continued blessings on the clergy and people of these parishes, and pray that we will all, “seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbour as yourself.” (BAS Baptismal Rite)

The Area Council continues to give meaningful and good leadership in supporting morally and financially the many wonderful ministries taking place across Trent Durham.

The College of Bishops is most grateful and indebted to retired clergy who willingly serve interim ministries. I thank the clergy of Trent Durham who retired last year for their selfless and devoted ministries, and wish them and their families good health and blessings in their retirement.

I also welcome the clergy who have begun new ministries in Trent Durham and wish them, their families and parishes fruitful and fulfilling ministries.

And now a piece of homework: Testify!

Please take and make opportunities this coming year, to share your personal stories of faith, miracles, answered and unanswered prayers, blessings, abundance and heart's desires – that is, share all or part of your faith journey with one another. Share in small groups, tell it in services, risk and dare to tell, out LOUD, what it is that brings you to church, that gets you up in the morning, that gives you hope.

May God bless you richly in 2017 and equip you in the work to which God has called you.

Yours faithfully,

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