

Archbishop's Pastoral Letter to Vestries, 2016

to be read or circulated on the Sunday of the parish's annual vestry meeting



Diocese of Toronto
Anglican Church of Canada

To the Clergy, Churchwardens and Parishioners
My Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

May the grace and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

As you gather today in the annual vestry meeting of your parish or congregation, I want to express my gratitude for your faithfulness in living out our diocesan mission to *Worship* God, *Proclaim* the Gospel and *Embody* in word and action the reconciling love of Jesus. The Area Bishops and I are especially thankful for the leadership of the clergy, churchwardens and officers of your parish. I am deeply mindful of the prayer, "*grant that we may never forget that our common life depends upon each other's toil*" and that is so true of our life together as members of the Church. Thank you!

This year we have witnessed an almost unprecedented humanitarian crisis as the world's refugee and near-refugee population has surpassed 50 million people. The generosity of responses from so many is heartening. More than 40% of our parishes are in the process of sponsoring a refugee family either directly or in joining with other parishes or faith groups in assisting in a sponsorship. The Diocese has made a grant of \$500,000 available through the Ministry Allocation Fund to support congregations in reaching out. Details of this grant will be circulated in the next few weeks.

I have asked Vestries to consider a motion about the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report on Residential Schools. "Answering the Call for Reconciliation", a booklet prepared by our Social Justice working group, gives a concise background to the issues. This is an important matter for our Church. Many indigenous people are Anglican. The Anglican Church had a major role in residential schools. We have been given a mandate by our Lord to be agents of healing and reconciliation. However you decide to deal with the motion, I hope it leads to wide discussion and action in your parish.

In my Charge to Synod, (see www.toronto.anglican.ca/2015/11/13/archbishops-charge-to-synod) I took as my theme "things old and new", a recognition that we need both to honour and use, to the best of our abilities, the excellent resources of our Anglican tradition. As well, we need to think and work outside the box, to find new and creative ways to respond to God's call to mission in our own neighbourhoods. Not one or the other; both are required today.

This requires us to be "*encouraging and continually re-centering the community in which we know that both the resources of stability and the risks of change come from the Spirit.*" "Re-centering" is critical. It is remembering what is at the heart of it all: God's unquenchable love for the whole of Creation revealed in Jesus Christ.

I have a continuing concern that we deepen our own understanding of our faith in Jesus Christ and our ability to speak of that faith reasonably and confidently, and to give voice "to the hope that lies within us" as St. Paul writes. I hope that you will find ways in your parish (or even better, working with other congregations) and on your own, to pursue that this year. Bible studies, discussion groups, book clubs and prayer circles are opportunities to gather and practise articulating the joy of a life that is rooted and grounded in Christ.

May you have a productive Vestry Meeting today and may you find this to be truly a Year of Grace.

Yours faithfully in Christ Jesus,

The Most Rev'd Colin R. Johnson
Archbishop of Toronto