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## A Pastoral Letter to Vestry 2017

January 25, 2017

The Feast of the Conversion of St. Paul

My sisters and brothers in Christ,

Grace and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Cor 1:2)

As many of you may already know, the *Oxford English Dictionary* chose ‘post-truth’ as its word of the year for 2016. Post-truth is defined as ‘relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief.’ In the same vein, in 2017, we have already heard about ‘alternative facts’: when claims about record-setting attendance figures at the most recent U.S. presidential inauguration were called into question by hard evidence, some senior political figures defended the Trump team’s claims as, simply, ‘alternative facts.’

The kind of life that God invites us to explore has a quality that contrasts sharply with these words and phrases. While beauty may be in the eye of the beholder, Christians believe that we can actually encounter the truth about ourselves, and the truth about God, in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. As you gather for your annual Vestry meeting, I invite you to rejoice in that truth and give thanks that God has revealed to us, in Christ, so wonderfully who God is. Bearing witness to the truth, through our words and action, is at the heart of what it means to follow Jesus, and we are not simply at the mercy of the political or economic forces of our world—no, we are a people who have something to say and who offer a way of life that is transformative.

This is my first Vestry letter to you as the Bishop of York-Credit Valley, and I am still in the early days of getting to know the people and clergy of this amazingly diverse area. Thank you very much for the warm welcome. So far I have spent time with my immediate predecessor, Bishop Philip Poole, learning about the people of the area and benefiting from his wisdom; met with the area’s Regional Deans; had one-on-one conversations with many of the gifted clergy and lay leaders who serve in our parishes; and spent time in prayer and scripture seeking to discern where God is leading us. I will continue to invest a substantial amount of my time in these early days in building relationships of mutual trust and respect with very many of you, so that we can move forward effectively in gospel ministry together. It is my determined hope, sustained by God, to be a bishop for the whole Church and so I am grateful, in advance, for your patience and encouragement as I grow into my episcopal ministry.



**Diocese of Toronto**  
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My intention is to visit all the parishes and other places of ministry in York-Credit Valley within 14 months of my consecration, and so I really look forward to worshipping with you in person in the near future. I am beginning this new season of my ordained ministry with a deep sense of our need to bear, together, both the joys and sorrows of our Diocese and of the wider church, mindful at this time that ‘as it is, there are many parts, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you,” nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you”’ (1 Corinthians 12:20-21).

I have also recently been reflecting on the fact that hope, for a follower of Jesus, is not an emotion but a virtue. Virtues are the habits that make up our character—and sustain and shape our behaviour when our emotions may be all over the map—and these virtues are cultivated as we reflect on the future that God has promised to each of us. Christian virtues are always cross-shaped and grace-driven. Hope is a virtue that we are called to practise every day, in our homes, in our places of work, and in our churches.

And since hope is not an emotion, I would encourage each of you to look at practical ways to incarnate hope in your own life, and in the life of your parish, in this coming year. As an act of hope, engage with the Social Justice Vestry motion addressing the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Read our new Diocesan Strategic Plan, *Growing in Christ*, and begin to pray with hope about how its five areas of focus will become realised in your parish and the York-Credit Valley area. Ask how in your parish life you are intentionally creating for people—both those already part of your church and those in your neighbourhood—opportunities to (re)discover and learn about the hope found in Christ Jesus.

This letter comes with my prayers for your Vestry meeting as you discuss and discern, with hope, how you can be faithful to the call of God to live out the truth that we find in Jesus Christ. Thank you for your ministry and hard work, whether you are continuing in your current role or looking to serve in new ways. It is a privilege to work and witness alongside you as your Bishop.

Peace,

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