

The Right Reverend Kevin Robertson  
Area Bishop of York-Scarborough  
Bishop Suffragan of Toronto



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January 18, 2021

The Feast of the Confession of St. Peter

Dear friends in York-Scarborough,

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

I have the privilege of writing once again as you gather for your annual Vestry meeting. Vestry is an important moment in the life of any parish. We are given the opportunity to look back with thanksgiving on the past year and look forward with hope as we catch a vision of what God is calling us to be in the year ahead.

Never before have we experienced a year like 2020. A year ago, we were just beginning to hear reports out of Wuhan, China of a virus that was spreading rapidly and making many people sick. Within weeks the virus was detected here in Canada. By mid-March our province was in lockdown. This meant that our churches were suddenly closed to public worship and most other activities.

Very quickly, Anglicans across our Diocese “pivoted” to begin doing mission and ministry in virtual ways in order to stay connected and keep the flame of the Gospel burning. Pre-recorded services, livestreams and Zoom worship sprang up to connect people from the safety of their own living rooms. For months, our church buildings remained shuttered, except for the important work of providing outreach to the most vulnerable in our communities. We hunkered down and sheltered at home. The Diocese was able to offer a Jubilee to all parishes for three months as a way of helping ministry continue. I know how well this was received, and I thank God that we had the resources to do it.

As COVID-19 cases decreased over the summer months, September brought new opportunities to begin gathering again. The Diocese’s amber guidelines were put in place, allowing parish communities to come together in-person once again. For several weeks, we were once again gathering in our sacred spaces, being fed at the Lord’s table, and enjoying fellowship with one another in familiar ways.

But no sooner had we begun, case numbers began to rise again, and news of more virulent strains of COVID from other parts of the world. In November, the City of Toronto - and Peel and York Regions - were in lockdown; by year end the whole province was essentially shut down. The effects have been devastating for so many: job losses, increases in addiction and mental health issues, a rise in domestic violence, loneliness due to isolation and separation from family members and friends. And yet you – the Church – have continued the life-giving work of the Gospel, by lovingly walking alongside those in greatest need. Thank you! And now several vaccines have been approved and are making their way into the arms of Canadians. Thanks be to God!

In the roller coaster of the past twelve months, we rose to the various challenges in ways many did not think possible. The necessary restrictions shifted almost everything we knew of church, yet the Gospel of Jesus Christ continued to be proclaimed and lived. I have been so proud of the ways that our parishes have been nimble in these difficult times. The Holy Spirit has indeed led us in this wilderness. Thank you to our clergy, churchwardens, parish staff, lay leaders and tech savvy volunteers who have made this pivot possible. I believe our Church leapt forward several decades in just a few short months, and I hope we will hold onto the spirit of adapting to rapidly changing circumstances.

COVID-19 was not the only challenge facing our Church and society over the past year. In May, we watched in horror as news outlets showed the vicious murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis. The killing of a black man by a white police officer reminded us painfully of the toxic forces of anti-black racism not only in the United States but also here at home. The Gospel calls us away from any kind of hatred and discrimination, and in our baptism we commit to respect the dignity of every human being. Our Diocese is responding to the scourge of racism by offering anti-racism and anti-bias training this year. As the newly-appointed Diocesan Diversity Officer, I look forward to help lead this work forward over the coming year.

2020 was also a year of change in leadership within our Diocese. Bishop Peter Fenty retired after seven years of episcopal ministry, and Bishop Jenny Andison made the decision to return to parish ministry after serving as an area bishop for four years. We give thanks for Bishop Peter and Bishop Jenny and for the ways they have blessed our Diocese. In response to these changes, Bishop Andrew has struck an Episcopal Leadership Working Group to help shape the future of episcopal leadership going forward. In this interim period, I have been asked to provide oversight to deaneries in York-Simcoe and York-Credit Valley, in addition to the five deaneries in York-Scarborough. Please pray for the work of the ELWG as we discern the future of leadership in our Church.

In spite of the challenges, I look back on 2020 with joy and thanksgiving at the opportunities to visit many of the 56 parishes and ministries of York-Scarborough. I was with you for Sunday worship, celebrations of new ministry, anniversaries, meetings with parish leadership, and many other special occasions – and much of it by Zoom! We even ordained four new priests in York-Scarborough between October and December, one of the many signs that the Church in our Diocese is still very much alive and well! I want to thank the clergy and people of the area as I have travelled across the episcopal area. I have been grateful for your prayers, and your desire to be co-workers in the building up of God's Church.

As I reflect on my ministry over the past year, I realize that my work would not have been possible without the support of my amazing assistant, Sue Willoughby. Sue does a great job managing my calendar and correspondence and ensuring that I am able to keep up with a ministry that has an increasing number of moving parts. Sue works closely with our exceptional synod office staff. They are all just a phone call or email away.

I want to acknowledge the excellent work of our five Regional Deans: the Reverend Ian LaFleur (Eglinton), the Reverend Greg Carpenter (Scarborough), the Reverend Canon Geoffrey Sangwine (St. James), the Reverend Shelley McVea (Toronto East) and the Reverend Nicholas Morkel (York Mills). The Reverend Heather Gwynne-Timothy continued her wonderful ministry as Chaplain to the Retired Clergy of York-Scarborough in 2020. Along with our area liturgical officers, our

Regional Deans are excellent resources for parishes, and provide me with invaluable advice. I have also valued the support and collegiality of the other members of the College: Bishop Andrew, Bishop Peter, Bishop Riscylla, Bishop Jenny and Canon Mary Conliffe.

Our episcopal area is also blessed with many incredible youth leaders, who are ably led by our two York-Scarborough Youth Coordinators, Jillian Ruch and Ian Physick. In the midst of this pandemic, they have found creative ways of staying in touch with our youth and encouraging them in their own ministries.

Finally, I want to express my thanks to all those who exercise leadership in the parishes, missions, schools, fresh expressions and community ministries of the York-Scarborough area. Whether you are stepping down from a particular ministry, or continuing on, or taking up a new role at this annual Vestry meeting, thank you for your commitment and faithfulness. You are a blessing to the Church in our Diocese. Please be assured of my prayers each day as you carry out your ministry in the name of Jesus Christ.

I am writing this letter on the Feast of the Confession of St. Peter. As our Church celebrates Peter's proclamation that Jesus is "the Christ, the Son of the Living God" (Matthew 16:16), please join with me in working for the vitality of the Church, built on Christ our cornerstone. Pray with hope for the year ahead.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kevin Robertson". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

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