

The College of Bishops Pastoral Letter to Vestries, 2023

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 of the Diocese of Toronto:

Dear friends,

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

As we come to our Annual Vestry Meetings, it is a good time for us to reflect with thanksgiving on the past and look with a sense of hopefulness to the year ahead.

The past year was significant in many ways in the life of our Diocese. First, we have been returning to some sense of normalcy after two years of Covid lockdowns and restrictions. While we continue to urge parishes to exercise caution, many of our communities have returned to something that resembles our pre-pandemic life together. We thank God that the worst of the pandemic now seems behind us.

Of course, parishes are continuing to grapple with the effects of Covid. Many of our churches continue to experience a decrease in Sunday attendance, fewer volunteers to fill key parish roles, and a diminished number of regular financial givers. Clergy and lay leaders also continue to experience a deep sense of fatigue and anxiety about the future. In that light, we continue to encourage a gentleness with one another and a renewed commitment to self-care as we navigate post-pandemic realities. Over the past year, we have been pleased to offer a mini-Sabbatical opportunity for clergy. These ten days – taken together or broken up – are intended for rest and renewal. We have been delighted to hear that many clergy have already taken a mini-Sabbatical or have made plans to do so in 2023.

The past year also saw the launch of “Cast the Net”, a strategic visioning process for our Diocese. Aably led by the Very Reverend Peter Elliott, Canon Ian Alexander and Dr Anita Gittens, ODT, the Cast the Net team has surveyed the clergy in the Diocese in various consultations, and is now engaging lay people from every parish across the Diocese. Based on John 21, this Biblically-grounded initiative is seeking to help us chart of path forward as a Diocese. We eagerly anticipate a full report from the Cast the Net team at our Synod next November.

Our restructuring of episcopal leadership also continued through 2022. The Episcopal Leadership Implementation Team followed up the good work of the Episcopal Leadership Working Group and brought forward a model for raising up and deploying territorial archdeacons and canon administrators to assist the bishops in their work. Interviews took place in November, leading to the appointment of four new archdeacons and one new canon administrator. Many of you were present at the Cathedral on January 15 as Archdeacon John Anderson, Archdeacon Theadore Hunt, Archdeacon Steven Mackison and Archdeacon Cheryl Palmer and Canon Laura Walton were collated. They have now begun their work and are already helping to share ministry with the College of Bishops.

After twenty years of service, Canon Clare Burns also retired as our Chancellor and is now Chancellor Emeritus. We are grateful for Clare’s ministry and are also delighted to welcome Marg Creal our new Chancellor. Those of you who were present at the New Year’s Levee on January 1 will remember the joy of Chancellor Creal’s installation.

Our work in the area of anti-bias and anti-racism (ABAR) also continued in 2022. The workshops for clergy concluded last year and we began to roll out the parish-based program. Clergy and lay facilitators are now trained to visit parishes and lead this important work. The ABAR Pod has also been formed to lead the ongoing work of dismantling bias and racism in our structures. May God continue to bless our efforts and encourage us in this vital work.

As we look ahead to a new year, we do so with a sense of great hope. Our beloved Church has changed dramatically over the past few years and will continue to change. But God is present and faithful, and our proclamation and sharing in the redemptive love of God in Christ continues to be the mission to which we are called.

Be assured of our prayers for each of you as you meet for your Annual Vestry Meeting. We want to express our profound thanks to all who exercise leadership in the Diocese of Toronto. Whether you are stepping down from a particular ministry, or continuing on, or taking up a new role this year, thank you for your commitment and faithfulness. You are a blessing to the Church in our Diocese.

We write this letter on the Feast of the Conversion of St. Paul. As the Church celebrates the beginning of Paul's evangelistic ministry to the Gentiles, please join us in praying and working for the extension of the Gospel in every place, and for the renewal of the Church in our midst.

Yours faithfully in Christ Jesus,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "+ Andrew Toronto".

The Right Rev. Andrew J. Asbil
Bishop of Toronto

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "+ Riscylla Shaw".

The Right Rev. Riscylla Shaw
Suffragan Bishop of Toronto

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "+ Kevin Robertson".

The Right Rev. Kevin Robertson
Suffragan Bishop of Toronto