

Charge to Vestry 2009  
St. George's of Forest Hill Anglican Church  
Kitchener, Ontario

We are now several weeks into the season of Epiphany. Each year, the readings lead us on a journey of growing to understand the light of Christ. From the eastern sages arriving and showing God's care for all the nations on earth, to the Transfiguration, and the light of God shining on Christ. We are challenged in this short season of Epiphany, to try to understand what we celebrated on Christmas. We are on a journey of discovering what the Incarnation of God in human flesh really means for us, some 2000 years later.

For myself, the challenge came from a different direction than it might usually have come. I was asked by the Bishop to be the retreat leader for the Ordinands' retreat this month, and so to help several people who are to be ordained to prepare themselves spiritually for this new thing God was calling them to as Deacons in the Church of God. I spent much of my vacation pouring over scripture and other books about ministry yet the thing that I kept returning to was that one thing that I found candidates for ordination about at every turn -- developing the life of prayer. These Ordinands are being ordained as Vocational Deacons. Their call is to interpret to the church the needs of the world out there, where we currently don't reach, and to proclaim the Gospel to those outside the church. They are called to help us to see the needs of the world. Week by week, our intercessors do a certain amount of that ministry for us. They call us to pray for the things that are happening in the world.

But as I thought about prayer in the last few weeks, it became very clear to me that prayer; communication with God is not simply a passive thing which allows us to get out from under any feeling of responsibility. We don't simply pray and then sit back and wait on God's action. We are Christ's body in the world today. When we pray about the needs of the world around us; when we pray for Christ's hand to touch those situations, we are indicating to God our own willingness to roll up our sleeves and get involved in finding the solutions necessary to address these problems. Honestly, the incarnation of God in human flesh means that we are responsible to share with God in growing this kingdom. We are responsible with God, for addressing the suffering that we see in the world around us. In this Diocese we ordain deacons to help us to see these needs; every priest carries these diaconal vows forward with them as well. And when these needs are identified, we gather as communities of faith, we pray for God to reach out and change these problems, and then we go out as a part of God's human incarnation, and we work; we get involved in changing the world.

Even more so than last year I come before you before our annual meeting of Vestry, and I stand in awe of the things that you have done as a community of faith in this one year. The huge project of building a Habitat for Humanity home was completed in five weeks of work. The Saed family now resides in their very first home, and has the opportunity to make a better foundation for their children, because people of this parish and the Deanery around us got involved in responding as God's hands and feet to the things we were praying about. You'll remember Nancy Mattes inviting us to the first faith and action prayer vigil, and from there, the vision grew, because faithful people acted on the prayers that they had prayed on that day.

The work of Primate's World Relief and development fund has a budget in Huron of 300,000.00 for development projects in the poorest nations of the world this year. There are well over 250 congregations in this Diocese, and yet at Synod, your delegates gave a gift to Huron Hunger Fund, which is our Diocesan arm of PWRDF, of 1/20<sup>th</sup> of that total goal. Here again, we have prayed for these needs of the world in those places, and the people of this parish have made those prayers into action. You have allowed God to be incarnate once again in you. You have allowed God to use your hands to reach out into these situations.

Anselma House, ROOF, St. John's Kitchen, St. Monica House, each one has seen answered prayer as the people of St. George's have addressed the needs of a hurting world in 2008. \$10,000.00 was specifically donated to specific projects with each of these outreach initiatives in 2008, and through those donations, God has been able to extend the love that is the mark of Christ's Kingdom. St. Monica House is able to maintain chaplaincy ministries in the year ahead. Many nutritious meals were served at St. John's Kitchen because of the gifts of St. George's. ROOF provided a special outing taking the kids off the street and giving them an experience that would otherwise be out of their reach, and Anselma House was assisted in growing their facility to meet a growing need. The hands through which God has become incarnate and addressed these needs though, are yours.

St. George's has committed to assist in a family linked refugee sponsorship through our Diocesan Refugee committee. We will act as sponsor to bring a Kitchener man's mother and two widowed sisters out of Pakistan to live with their family here. There is no financial commitment with this sponsorship, only the

responsibility to aid in settlement issues such as finding appropriate English as a second language courses, and medical and dental care. We were approached by the Diocesan committee because they felt that through the things they read and heard in the Diocese, we were a parish that was concerned with the needs of the community and the world around us.

In no other year, have I found the Angel Tree deliveries to be more moving. The situations were all different, but the tears of joy that sprang up were all the same. Your hands demonstrated to six families that their problems matter, and that God's love for them is very much real. They heard that message, because you took your prayers on to the next stage; you acted on them, and that action has spread the kingdom a little further.

But what of the year ahead?

There are challenges that lie before us in 2009. Murray and the property committee will speak at vestry about some of the pressing building concerns that must be addressed around St. George's to avoid allowing them to get progressively worse. Our building acts as a visible reminder to the community that there is a community of faith that meets here. It acts as a place where first impressions are formed on what sort of community of faith meets here. We must address these problems, and in the years to come, we need to keep a strategic plan for upkeep on the building to keep it from becoming run down. Over the next few years, we will have to address some further access issues in order to meet the provincial guidelines for full access to all public buildings. These challenges will require prayerful support from everyone to address them.

Murray and his committee have tried to be extremely responsible in their list of tasks that need our attention in the coming year so as not to overburden the parish budget. I was personally caught by Murray's statement at Council this month, that with even a dozen more volunteers that were willing to help the committee with accomplishing small items in the work list, several thousand dollars could be saved from the property budget this year.

Our Parish Growth Working Group has worked to get us started at addressing the priorities that were set at our May Vision Check-up. As a result of their work, some very exciting new projects are soon to be in place. Our parish staff will grow in 2009 to include both a part-time Childrens and Youth Ministry Co-ordinator, and a part-time communications person. Both of these have been funded by specific gifts outside of budget, and so they have no financial impact on the work of St. George's, but they will both need your support and assistance as we move into the stage of growing our church for the coming years.

The Primate's World relief and Development Fund is currently celebrating 50 years of work in the Canadian Church. One initiative of that 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary is for the Anglican Church in Canada to sponsor 50 full refugee claimants in the coming year. For each of these claimants, PWRDF will give \$2000.00 of the necessary money. The federal government has committed a further \$2000.00. \$20,000 would still be needed for a single application. After the extremely successful Deanery Habitat Build, it has been proposed that parishes in Waterloo Deanery attempt to raise the money to support one of the 50 projects identified for the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

St. George's carries on a long tradition of helping to raise up and prepare candidates for Holy Orders. In the past year, I have been privileged to participate in very special ways in two Diocesan Ordination services. In February I was honoured to be the preacher as Ted Winter – who had done his student ministry here – was ordained as a Deacon. In November, Jesse Dymond, who worshipped here at St. George's, and was recommended for ministry by this parish asked me to be his Clergy presenter as he was made a priest. Many fine clergy of this Diocese have drawn on the gifts of this parish as a part of their formation, and we carry on this long-standing ministry for the broader church through my continued participation as Bishop's examining chaplain on the Community of Deacons Board, and through the Student ministry of Margaret Walker and Laura Lightfoot. I know from my own student placement, that the way in which you care for these two students will have perhaps the greatest impact of all, on the sort of priest they will grow to be.

The Deanery of Waterloo has invited Andrew Weeks to present the Magnetic Church seminar in Waterloo. Andrew Weeks is an exceptional speaker who helps churches to be more effective in welcoming newcomers so that more will stay as active members of the congregation. 10 spaces at this limited seminar have been reserved for St. George's, and I hope that people who serve in all sorts of ministries, from readers to greeters, will consider taking the day to help us to become a more magnetic church.

Marlene Bocan was engaged by the Diocese to prepare the "Who is my Neighbour" demographic study of every parish in the Diocese of Huron. I met with Marlene in the early summer to hear her preliminary findings about St. George's. Her findings about St. George's point out the incredible potential for growth

that is here, and extend some challenges to us for doing a better job of getting the word out about the good things that are available here. One of her largest concerns about this parish has already been addressed by the city when they removed the five large trees across the front of the Church property, but there are still other things that we could be doing better. Her report will come to our council in the Spring of the year.

The year ahead promises to challenge and change us, but it is in challenge and change that God calls us out of our human self-centered ways, and opens us to be instruments of God's incarnation.

As he comes near to the end of his life, and is languishing in Herod's prison, John the Baptist finds that the confidence that has sustained him is slipping away. He sends his disciples to Jesus to ask if he truly is the one, or if they should look for another. John wants to make certain that he hasn't wasted his life. Jesus answers, "tell John what you see and hear. Tell him that the lame walk, the blind see, and the poor are hearing good news." Jesus doesn't give John or his disciples an easy answer, but he gives an answer that is every bit as true today as it was then. If you want to be certain that you are following the Christ, then look around at what you see happening. If Christ is truly present, you will see the signs of the Kingdom of God springing up also.

Whether I am looking back at the last few years, or forward into the work that we are committing ourselves to in the years to come, I know that Jesus is present in this community, because I see Him incarnate in you. I see Him reaching out with your hands; I see him touching the needs of the world around us;

calling us to prayer that leads to action. I see him, as you fish for people. I see him in you, and I give thanks.

Amen.