

Pastoral Letter November 15, 2018

This week I'd like to take a few moments to address the question, "If someone accused you of being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?" In the next few paragraphs I would like to share some memories about active Anglicans in parishes in which I have served. Let me begin by saying that there was overwhelming evidence that they were compassionate, kind, considerate Christians.

When I first met Larry I was impressed by his bright smile and friendly demeanour. Over the next several years I was to discover that he was a brilliant, talented, gifted person who frequently put the needs of others first. He had the capacity to dream big and to work hard. He was loyal to his friends and devoted to his family. Larry was the kind of person that you could call in the middle of the night and no matter where you were or what had happened, he would be there for you. It should not surprise you that he was a member of the leadership of the local Anglican Church. He was well admired and respected in the community and adored by his wife and children. There was lots of evidence to convict him of the accusation that he was a Christian. He was a person of morals, ethics and values. All of which were firmly grounded in scripture. I remember our last Christmas together. I was sitting in his living room with Larry and his wife. We were surrounded by Christmas decorations and we were sharing a joke and a drink to celebrate the season. We should all be so lucky as to have a friend like Larry whose actions and attitudes offer unequivocal evidence that he is a believer.

I met Betty twenty-six years ago. She lived in a huge home with the front windows facing Lake Erie. Every piece of furniture seemed to have a family story connected to it. She was a gentle and enthusiastic person. Over the years I discovered that she facilitated several small charities out of her kitchen and living room. The house was always filled with people. There was laughter and music everywhere. She quickly became one of my favourite people to visit. She was admired and respected in the community and adored by her family. Very few people knew that cancer was ravaging her body. I remember the day that she told me about the cancer. The conversations began with her saying to me, "I noticed the last time I was in the rectory that you don't have a china cabinet. How would you like to give your wife a china cabinet for Christmas?" As you can imagine I was shocked by the question and then the explanation that followed answered my questions. She said, "I won't be here for Easter and so I'm making sure that I get a chance to see the expressions on people's faces while I give away my most prized possessions." Betty died a few months later and there was a gaping hole in the life of the community. As we gathered to celebrate her life we remembered her as the person with the gifts of hospitality, generosity, kindness, patience and perseverance. There was lots of evidence to convict her of the accusation of being a Christian.

When I first met Brian, I was stunned by his tall, slender presence. He was a quiet and often gentle man. You may not have been able to guess on first meeting but he was a brilliant Chartered Accountant. His humility and grace only became obvious as you got to know him. He was a loving husband and a devoted father. He believed in community. He shared his gifts and talents without reservation. He was a conservative and cautious Anglican, but his strong faith radiated in everything that he did. Brian quietly served on several committees, boards and volunteer organizations offering wisdom and insight from a Christian perspective. He became one of my closest advisors. We were devastated when we lost him to cancer recently. I will always remember his counsel and advice. There was overwhelming evidence to convict him of the accusation of being a Christian.

I remember visiting Sally in her home. I was startled by her announcement, "I'm blind." The truth of the matter is, I think she could see vague shadows. I was also shaken by the long oxygen hose that ran from a machine to her nose. It seemed to have tubing that ran in large circles from room to room. She was a woman filled with laughter, wonderful stories, extraordinary memories and she was dressed immaculately every time I saw her. Each time I arrived I could hear her voice shouting, "Come on in, Dear. The tea is ready and I have

your favourite cookies.” She had served on the church Altar Guild, Parish Council and numerous committees, as well as several community based volunteer groups. She had been a loving wife and was a devoted mother who spoke to her children on the phone every day. There was overwhelming evidence to convict her of the accusation of being a Christian in her words and in her actions. Conducting her Celebration of Life service was one of the most painful experiences of my ministry. I knew she was with God for eternity. I wept not for her, but for those of us left behind without her.

Today I share these stories with you to invite you to an inner reflection. Here’s the question, “How will you be remembered? Is there overwhelming evidence to convict you of the accusation of being a Christian?”

Blessing
Fr Stephen