



# CHRIST CHURCH CATHEDRAL OTTAWA

*A diverse and vibrant community that glorifies God and welcomes all people*

## THE DEAN'S CHARGE TO VESTRY 2022

*God of transfiguration, transform our hearts and minds so that we may hear your message, and fill the world with your glory; through Jesus Christ, the chosen one. Amen. (Collect for Transfiguration Sunday)*

In 2019, then-Dean Parker began his Charge to Vestry with this passage of scripture from Second Corinthians, which we read again this morning:

*And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit. Therefore, since it is by God's mercy that we are engaged in this ministry, we do not lose heart. (2 Corinthians 3.18-4.1)*

No one had any idea just how much we would need to cling to God's mercy, and pray that we would not lose heart, over the ensuing three years. Engaging in ministry as we have known it, has been particularly difficult this past year, as our cathedral doors have been closed more than they have been open. Cheering signs of the pandemic ending turned to groans of despair as new variants arose, and the bright hope of celebrating Christmas together was dashed at the last moment. Even trying to contemplate reflecting the glory of the Lord became a struggle. And once finally allowed to open, the surrounding streets and neighbourhood were occupied and unsafe. Positive transformation of any kind seemed impossible.

Yet, here we are: raising our voices in songs of praise, listening to the scriptures, offering our prayers, celebrating the Eucharist, being the church. Thank you for your unfailing support; your willingness to pivot, time and time again; your loving care of one another; your strong desire to serve others; your generous gifts of time, talent and money; your deep faithfulness to God. Like Peter, James and John, even though weighed down with weariness, we continue on this adventure of faith together, prepared to climb whatever mountains are before us to follow Jesus.

On the Mount of Transfiguration, the disciples' perceptions were shattered and cleansed and opened to a new way of seeing – but not without a struggle. When faced with the mind-blowing vision of Jesus' changed appearance, his clothes becoming dazzling white, and Moses and Elijah appearing, Peter suggests that they build three dwellings to preserve this glorious moment. He wants to hang on to it, to stay in it, to make it permanent and not let it go. God's response is to send a cloud to overshadow and terrify the disciples, shocking them out of their sentimental nostalgia, and telling them to listen to Jesus, the Chosen One. It worked – for once they were silent enough to hear.

Poet William Blake wrote:

*If only the doors of perception were cleansed, we would see the infinity of all things.*

Although we might not characterize the pandemic as a mountaintop experience, coming out on the other side of it may well be a heady time. We may be tempted to try and recreate the glory of the “before times”; or to rush headlong into making up for lost time; or to set high and immediate expectations for ourselves and others as to what life must be like now.

Or we can pause and take the opportunity to cleanse our perception, listen deeply to God's call, and see differently. When I do so, I see three primary activities that our cathedral needs to focus on over the next year: we need to gather in community, heal from the pandemic, and shape our ministry.

Our Christian faith is not a solo endeavour – it requires community. We need to gather together, listen to one another's stories, experience God's presence in our midst, challenge each other in love, and witness to God's power in one another and to others.

Over these past two years, we have vaccinated and self-isolated to protect the common good. Yet by doing so, our perception changed – we became more self-centred and introverted. Ironically, this seems to have had the effect of eroding our sense of the common good. As one of my friends described, we have become somewhat feral – not remembering how to dress, how to be patient with others, how to control our facial expressions, how to disagree well, how to hold healthy boundaries.

And although we have tried to keep connected through the use of various technologies, nothing bonds us like gathering together. Gathering reminds us of our uniqueness and interconnectedness. Gathering builds us up as we encounter and discover others. Gathering expands our horizons to see new vision. Gathering gives us meaning and purpose. Gathering offers an intergenerational context in which to relate and worship. Gathering helps us be our authentic selves as individuals and as a community of faith. May our gathering be intentional.

Biblical commentator Bruce Epperly reminds us:

*God is fully present in moments of celebration and of clarity, and God is also embedded in moments of confusion and desolation. Each moment can be a sacrament for those who open to God's presence. There are no moments without divine guidance, inspiration, or beauty – even moments of pain and death.*

This past year has been particularly painful. We have suffered illness. Loved ones have died. Relationships have changed. Our emotions have been battered and bruised. We have been alone and afraid and discouraged. No one has come through the pandemic unaffected or unscathed. The extent of our suffering, the ramifications of it all, will not be clear for some time.

Our church is a caring organization by nature but we need to be more intentional in that care as we heal from the pandemic. Just as we uniquely experience trauma, our healing will be uniquely individual. We will not heal in the same way or at the same time. Some will need to gather in order to be healed. Some will need heal before they are able to gather. It will be very important to give time and space and respect to one another.

We are blessed with a Pastoral Care Team and a Prayer Team, friendly visitors and clergy, many connections and relationships and supports, including our diocesan ministry, the Ottawa Pastoral Counselling Centre. We have the sacraments of healing and of reconciliation. Let us use all available resources to care, to heal, to find divine guidance, inspiration and beauty in each moment on this adventure of faith. May our healing be gentle.

Theologian, ethicist and public intellectual Stanley Hauerwas wrote:

*Adventure requires courage to keep us faithful to the struggle, since by its very nature, adventure means that the future is always in doubt. And just to the extent that the future is in doubt, hope is required, as there can be no adventure if we despair of our goal. Such hope does not take on the form of excessive confidence; rather it involves the simple willingness to take the first step. (from 'A Community of Character')*

As the cathedral, our adventure of faith is inextricably linked to the life of our diocese and both its arms, of community ministry and of parish ministry. Over the past number of years, our community ministries have developed, strengthened and expanded, providing more and more essential services to the vulnerable and those in need. Now Bishop Parker is calling us to change the way we think and act in our parish ministry.

We are the generation to address our antiquated church structures, as well as where and how we minister as God's people. Currently, fifty-seven percent of Anglican church members in our diocese are aged 60 and over. There was a 20% decline in Sunday attendance between 2010 and 2019, and that percentage is likely under-represented. In that same time, there was an upward trend in givings, but our financial health rests on fewer and fewer people. The past we have known is falling away and is giving away to a future that we are free to shape.

The first step in our Diocesan Shape of Parish Ministry Consultation was to amass and study parish statistics, trends and parish profiles, and compile them into a compendium. An official launch has been held, and now every parish is engaged in completing a toolkit which asks specific questions about our response to the compendium, our current state, our willingness to change, and what opportunities we see before us. Every aspect of ministry is up for examination and discussion, from where parishes need to be located to how clergy are deployed. Twenty-five percent of your Dean's time is spent on diocesan ministry, and as the cathedral, we need to consider how our ministry mirrors that commitment to resource, support and lead our diocese.

Please pray for those who are entrusted with this work on behalf of our cathedral. Please pray for our bishop as he leads us with courage and vision. Please be prepared to contribute your ideas and creativity as we move forward. The first step has been taken, and as with any adventure, the future is unknown; but the Holy Spirit is already there, awaiting us and calling us forward. May our shaping of ministry be confident and faithful.

None of these – gathering together, healing from the pandemic, shaping our ministry – can happen by our own merits, and I am profoundly glad and deeply grateful to be journeying with you. The transforming light of Christ is present and visible in you, in our staff and clergy, in each volunteer, newcomer and visitor. May we keep inspiring one other to be of good heart on this adventure of faith.

*Glory to God, whose power working in us, can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine. Amen. (Book of Alternative Services)*

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