



CHRIST CHURCH CATHEDRAL OTTAWA

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

THE DEAN'S CHARGE TO VESTRY 2023

Spirit of the desert, you drove Jesus to the edge of the world to seek your truth and find his calling: scour our hearts and awaken our hunger, so that freed from empty clinging we may serve only you and the Creator; through Jesus Christ, the Lord of the wilds. Amen. (Collect for the First Sunday in Lent: *Prayers for an Inclusive Church* (2009) alt.)

Perhaps we can now identify more fully with Jesus being driven to the edge of the world to seek God's truth and to find his calling. For over the past three years, the desert came to us. As waves of the pandemic rolled like never-ending, undulating sand dunes, shifting, and changing underneath and around us, truth was hard to discern, and our very identity was challenged. We hungered for safety, stability, connection, and a return to what we once knew as normal. And now that things are settling, temptations lie before us – ones much the same as those laid before Jesus in the wilderness.

Having been baptized and claimed as God's beloved child, Jesus is in the wilderness. Three times, in the midst of discerning his vocation, he is tempted to stray from who he is and to whom he belongs. As biblical commentator Bruce Epperly says:

Jesus goes to where the wild things are, and discovers the wild things are internal as well as external. Jesus' journey into the wilderness points to the importance of mindfulness in the spiritual journey.

Through this experience of temptation, Jesus learns about his vulnerability, and in doing so, becomes stronger. He remembers who he is, trusts God to whom he belongs, and sets us out on a path that will change the world.

In our desert time, we carried hope that all would be well again – otherwise we could not have kept going. And that small hope has blossomed as we have begun to gather again, to heal from the pain we have experienced, and to shape our ministry together.

Life is returning, and things that we once took for granted feel fresh: receiving communion at the altar rail; hearing the voices of boys and girls raised in song; seeing one another's faces; enjoying eating pancakes together; having in-person meetings; hosting community events that fill our cathedral to capacity; visiting in one another's homes. There is much for which to be thankful and to enjoy.

And now is exactly the time when the temptation is strong to either rest on the laurels of how we were in the past or to madly rush off in all directions seeking new purpose and meaning. So rather than do either of those things, may we be mindful in our spiritual journey, clear about who we are and to whom we belong, open to the energy stirring around us and responsive to what we are now called to do.

Our cathedral sits on a promontory and holds a prominent place in the heart of our city. Every person who enters this space is affected by its sacredness. As its proud stewards and caring custodians, we have a responsibility to ensure that it is as accessible and open as possible so that the Spirit here may be fully encountered by many.

In the coming year, the steps to the front doors on Sparks Street need to be replaced. They have been a safety hazard for some time and cannot be used in their current condition. At today's Vestry, initial concept drawings and costings will be shared, and a motion presented to move this project forward. Long-time and well-beloved member of our cathedral, Fred Thorpe, left a bequest which will serve as the seed money.

And next year, the entrance on Queen Street will need to be refurbished, the steps replaced, and an accessible ramp built. Queen Street is being re-zoned to neighbourhood status, which means that the speed limit will be reduced, and calming measures will be introduced. A wonderful bonus for us is that a lay-by or drop-off zone in front of Lauder Hall will be included in the scope of work. A financial appeal will be launched later in the spring to garner support for the balance of cost of the Sparks Street steps and the Queen Street entrance.

Entrances are so very important as they offer welcome to those who are seeking. They also serve as exits through which we take the Good News and love of God out into our world.

Our world around the cathedral is changing daily, as Phase II of Cathedral Hill, the Reichmann retirement residence, nears its full height. Our diocese and our cathedral had the foresight and took the risk of ensuring our property provides revenue but also creates a neighbourhood. In a year from now we will have new neighbours and conversations are already taking place as to how we can partner with one another. We have a responsibility, having created a neighbourhood, to now create community.

This will be one of our new local partners. As a cathedral, we have local, national, and international partnerships. With the pandemic and simply with time, some of those have fallen away. Others, like the one with Reichmann's, are beginning. It is time for us to revisit and refresh our partnerships and so in May we will hold a Forum on Partnerships, in order to explore and expand our connections.

We will continue to move over this next year from being closed to inviting people in, from being isolated to creating community, from being disconnected to partnering. And through it all, we will become more and more of who we are as a cathedral. We will have much opportunity to show others to whom we belong. And by being mindful of the Spirit and being open to its energy, we will be not only renewed but also reinvigorated in our calling.

Thank you for journeying through the desert and navigating the wilds of these days. Thank you for choosing to be part of our cathedral at a time when there are other tempting places to be. Thank you for investing your trust and sharing your generosity. Thank you for being the people of God, in this place, serving our Creator with joy and gladness and fullness of heart. Amen.

The Very Reverend Beth Bretzlaff
Dean of Ottawa