

The Dean's Charge to Vestry 2024

God of mercy, alone we have no power in ourselves to help ourselves. When we are discouraged by our weakness, strengthen us to follow Christ, our pattern and our hope; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen. | Collect for the Third Sunday in Lent

This collect for the Third Sunday in Lent wonderfully reflects today's gospel in which we hear how Jesus makes a whip of cords and drives the people, livestock, and money changers out of the temple. It is a raucous scene full of emotion, confusion, and chaos. A scene where people cannot seem to help themselves. And yet, amidst it all, there is some clarity as Jesus' disciples remember that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me."

Often when we read this gospel, we do so far too literally, and like the disciples we need to pause and remember the larger reality. The temple is a space to worship God and from which to serve the community. It cannot function without also being a marketplace, as the temple must be financially sustainable to offer worship and provide ministry. Jesus knows what it is to be a temple of God as he is God incarnate, the Word made flesh. And his life and ministry teach us that God is not meant to just be worshipped in a place, but God is also to rule in our hearts and be lived out in our actions.

Jesus is upset when he enters the temple because he immediately experiences a lack of balance. One aspect of the temple's life is over functioning and other aspects are downplayed or neglected. God's care is once again revealed through Jesus as he corrects and points to a better way. As followers of Jesus, we are invited to recognize that we have no power in ourselves to help ourselves, to call upon Jesus to be our pattern and hope, and to trust in God that we can do far more than we can ask or imagine.

As our Cathedral meets today for its annual vestry, we have an opportunity to review the balance of our life. The Christmas season marked one full year since the end of mask-wearing mandates and pandemic restrictions. This is not a long time in the great scheme of things, and we have been working hard to recover, discover who we are now, and set a path for the future. None of this would be happening without you – faithful people, amazing volunteers, dedicated staff, and devoted clergy. Our Cathedral is blessed with much heart, leadership, and vision, and it is wonderful to be part of it all.

It is also remarkable to see the power of this place and its people gaining energy and enthusiasm. In the past six months over thirty people have not only joined our Cathedral but are also fully engaged in its life. Five adults are preparing for baptism on the Second Sunday of Easter. Our music program is soaring, and our choirs are planning trips to Ireland, New York City, and beyond. The clergy team, Bishop Shane, Doug, Michelle, Rob, and I, are delighted to welcome Jarrett as deacon residentiary, and Katherine as honorary assistant. Council membership is being refreshed with people who have not served before. Potlucks and pancakes, hotdogs and holly tea are enjoyed with gusto. There is much to celebrate!

In last year's charge to vestry, I stated: "...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."

The development and adoption of our new brand came out of this mindfulness, openness, and responsiveness. And it was a catalyst, revealing that our structures and governance no longer work with who we are now and where we are called to go. This often occurs in an organization's life after a major interruption – like Jesus entering the temple or a worldwide pandemic. It is exciting to have the opportunity to hit the refresh button, let go of those things that need to be let go of, build on our strengths, and challenge ourselves in new ways.

Much like the temple in the time of Jesus, our Cathedral has three spheres to balance: development, ministry, and mission.

Development consists of fundraising, restoration of our property, and endowment for the future. It is how we give thanks for God's gifts, fund our ministries, and plan. We have much work to do in this sphere. Our beautiful heritage building requires a lot of upkeep such as the replacement of the Sparks Street steps, and regular maintenance costs keep rising. Our diocese has reduced reliance on parish revenues by twenty percent overall and there is a stream of income from the development of our shared property but the gap between our revenue and expenses still widens. The bulk of our income comes from your financial donations, so please consider your contribution as your support is both needed and appreciated.

Ministry is our core competency, made up of liturgy and music, pastoral care, and spiritual growth. It is a gateway to God through experience. Our Cathedral has much strength in this sphere. Developing new liturgical offerings, though, requires more people resources. A team of lay readers will be called and trained over the next year, and we will seek to renew membership on the various teams that serve in ministry.

Mission is lived out in our local context, through our role as Cathedral of our diocese, and potentially through providing events and conferences. It is where our gift of hospitality shines and where we get to dream. We have built a neighbourhood on this block, now we are called to form community in concrete ways. Beginning this year, our Cathedral will play a significant role in anchoring and animating youth ministry in our diocese. And we will explore hosting events and conferences, beginning with the North American Cathedral Deans Conference in April, as we look to build our capacity for convening and empowering people in their lives and ministry.

As focus and balance is brought to our development, ministry and mission, training for leadership is essential. Our diocese, having completed the Shape of Parish Ministry Consultation and created an action plan, is launching support in this area. Tailored education and development models for parish councils are rolling out this spring, resource hubs and knowledge networks are being established, and a plan for equipping parishes for contextual mission has begun. It is an exciting time in our church!

May we have zeal to be God's house, with Jesus as our pattern and hope, and encouraged and inspired by the Spirit. May our Cathedral be grounded in the faith we hold and share the good news with joy, in all we do and say and be. Amen.

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