

the anglican church of the Incarnation

October 28, 2010

Greetings!

It has been a couple of weeks since I officially started here and I wanted to (re-)introduce myself to all of the congregation and try to answer some questions you might have about what lay ahead for us in our new ministry partnership.

First, let me say that it is good to be with you. I am grateful for the warm welcome I have received from so many. I am delighted by the opportunities I have had thus far to worship with you in such creative forms, get to know you (including, it seems, Chuck Norris, who introduced himself at a Community/Children's Focus last Sunday!), learn about the ministries here and meet with various ministry teams, and begin to wonder about what contributions I can make to those ministries.

Who am I? What is my story?

The bald facts are I was born and baptized in Toronto; raised in Oakville from the age of one as the eldest of four siblings; attended Morden Public School and (the now closed) Purdue High School; liked Scouting (canoeing and camping), softball, and school; worshipped, learned, was confirmed, served, led and preached (at 13) at St. Aidan's, Oakville; got excited about my faith at Niagara Youth Conference (although back then it was "Leadership" rather than "Youth"); studied Philosophy at Huron College; wed Connie; graduated with degrees from Huron, Western and the Episcopal Divinity School, Cambridge, MA; was ordained deacon and priest; served in Burlington; Guelph; Hamilton; and Ancaster; began doctoral studies at Trinity College, Toronto in philosophical theology; trained for and took up Interim Ministry where I have served parishes in Hamilton, Oakville [including a brief stint here in April 2005], Fort Erie, Burlington and Stewarttown; and, quite recently, chaired the coalition which led the Community Justice Camp 2010. Somewhere in there Connie and I became proud parents of two (now adult) daughters and one recently and happily acquired son-in-law! Also along the way I have enjoyed the privilege of engaging my passions for and interests in social justice ministries, spirituality, visioning and strategic planning, pastoral ministries, teaching and learning, preaching, worship renewal, facilitating baptismal ministries, fostering the ministries of children and youth.... My story continues as I now enter into a partnership in ministry with you; write my doctoral thesis on truth and religious narratives; and engage the specific adventures into which those vocations lead.

What is my present role? For how long will I serve in it?

Bishop Michael has appointed me as Priest-in-charge here, as opposed to Rector or Interim Pastor.

A Rector would normally be chosen and appointed by the Bishop after a period of extensive consultation with the parish's Parochial Committee [consisting of the Wardens & Lay Delegates to Synod, including the Youth Delegate to Synod]. The term of a Rector's position is "during the diocesan Bishop's pleasure," and the term tends to vary from a few years to, in some cases, decades.

In our diocese, an Interim Pastor would normally be appointed by the Bishop with much less consultation. An Interim Pastor does the job of a Rector, in addition to assisting a congregation with certain developmental tasks concerning the discernment of its part in God's mission and its readiness to pursue that mission. The Interim Pastor usually covenants with a parish that she/he will not be a candidate for the position of Rector. The term of an Interim Pastor is also during the Bishop's pleasure, but it tends to vary from a few months to perhaps 1 or 2 years.

The role of Priest-in-charge does not have the same kinds of "automatic" clarity that these other roles do. While the same responsibilities and authority fall to a Priest-in-charge as for a Rector, the former title is used in instances where special circumstances seem to call for a different model. It introduces considerable flexibility about our shared mandate. In our case, a consultation with Archdeacon Michael Patterson will lead to our naming the specific goals we all (diocese, parish, & priest-in-charge) have for Incarnation. It is only with the clarity that might emerge from that covenanting process that it will be possible to begin to anticipate how long my term here will be. Until then, we will need to name, hold onto and reflect on our questions about what is coming next.

What will I be doing?

It is my understanding of parish ministry that an ordained minister is engaged in a wide array of roles and responsibilities. I want to be amongst you, baptismal ministers of Incarnation, as pastor, priest, preacher, teacher, administrator, facilitator and guide.

One of my first priorities is to be available to visit and listen to you. I expect to be in the office on most Monday mornings and available by appointment on many Sunday afternoons, Monday afternoons and evenings. In addition, I am delighted to have stumbled onto the bristol board question mark in the office. It gave birth to a "My question is..." initiative. I know that members are often not available for at-home visits. As a creative alternative or addition to such pastoral visits (when an alternative is needed), the "My question is..." papers I have been handing out on Sunday mornings have already started important exchanges between me and both the children and adults of the parish about matters of faith and concern to them. These little slips of paper are still available for you to use to engage with me in a dialogue [or send an e-mail query to rector@incarnationchurch.ca], especially when other demands may make it difficult for us to arrange individual pastoral visits as quickly as might be desired. Please don't make your questions anonymous. I need to know to whom I am addressing my response. Please also let me know when you or others are sick, in hospital or in some kind of need. In the event of an urgent pastoral need when I am not in the church office, please use my cell phone (905) 802-8295 [a Burlington exchange] or 1 (905) 627-0805 [my home number in Dundas].

It is my desire to be present and supportive as a ministry companion and guide. I would very much like the opportunity to meet with every committee and working group in the parish in the first few months. I want to hear about how you undertake your ministries, where you find them fulfilling, what difficulties you encounter in exercising them, what assistance and resources you need from me and the rest of your sisters and brothers in the parish to perform them; and when you feel a call to change or deepen your involvement with them.

A couple of my “My question is...” questioners asked, rather generously, how they could be of assistance to me. It may be helpful to share my response to them with everyone.

- Pray often for our sojourn in ministry together.
- Help me to (re-)learn your names.
- Help me learn my way around here, letting me know when I am stretching local norms. (Not that I can always promise to stop; but it is good to know when I am doing so!).
- Keep communication lines open, so that ideas, encouragement, needs, concerns, suggestions and feedback can all flow frequently, freely and **directly**. Let us, therefore, talk to one another, not about one another, especially when there are hurts and concerns to share.
- Make use of my “open door.” Encourage others to do so and to ask me to visit them.
- Know of my profound desire to be of support to you all, individually, as households and as the household of faith in the parish.
- Let me know what you have passion for in your ministry.
- Listen for and consider responding to future requests to help with healing and strengthening the parish and its various ministries.

Gratitude for the work of others

As I come into your midst, I am aware of our collective indebtedness to those who have exercised leadership here since Vestry. The Church of the Incarnation is much blessed by gifted and dedicated staff and lay leaders. On your behalf, I extend our deep gratitude to: Angela Barraclough, Administrative Assistant; Janice Moro, former Music Director; Charlene Pauls, Interim Music Director; the numerous, tireless and extraordinary lay leaders who have stepped up during the difficulties of this time of transition. One of the ways in which we can live out that gratitude is to be careful not to burn out such devoted people. Our expectations of one another need to be gently realistic. Patience and determination to pace ourselves carefully will be important gifts for the well-being of people and parish alike.

I would also like to extend many thanks to the clergy leaders who accompanied the parish during the past many months: Bishop Ralph Spence, Archdeacon Michael Patterson, and the Reverends: Victoria Edgeworth-Pitcher, Jay Lefevre, Erin Marriott, and Canon Marni Nancekivell.

“I am not all there”

One of the things we do know is that my appointment is, at this time, for 60% of a full-time equivalent. This reduction in clergy staff time helps the parish consolidate debt, even as it challenges our ability to offer a “full-service” range of ministries. When I once explained my part-time role in another parish, a visitor quipped, “Ah, that means you’re not all there!” I loved her phrase. I am not all here. I am also committed to writing my doctoral thesis. It has been very difficult to do this while working at anything else. In order to help me devote chunks of time to thesis writing, I have discussed with the Bishop, Executive Officer and Wardens my plans to work in a kind of “on/off” pattern (with continuous on-call availability for pastoral emergencies) During one week, I intend to work up to 40 hours and during the week that follows, I will strive to discipline myself keeping my church commitments to 8 hours, averaging out at 24 hours per week (60%). So the week of November 7th is an “on” week; the 14th an “off” one; and so on. Of course, I have already lost control of this, accumulating overtime with the seemingly irresistible desire to “hit the ground running.” As a result, I will have to juggle my work hours creatively and will need your help scheduling normal church meetings during “on” weeks. I will also try to keep you informed when that alternating week schedule needs to be adjusted.

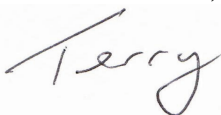
By the way, one of the ways in which I will not be “all here” is that on November 7th I am honouring the invitation I accepted more than a year ago to be guest preacher at Christ’s Church Cathedral, Hamilton, as part of their 175th anniversary celebrations. [That’s a *terquasquicentennial* for those who like obscure and obtuse words!] Canon Marni is back to help the congregation observe All Saints Day in my absence.

More to come

It is my habit to make lengthy, periodic reports to Parish Council and the parish at large, like this long missive. I believe that communication is an important part of transparent leadership and shared accountability. So you are likely to receive many more words from me in the future. If you have suggestions as to how my communications can be formatted so that they are in more engaging and readable forms, please let me know.

And so we have begun. May God bless us. May the journey ahead be fulfilling, strengthening and life-giving for us all. May the ministries which our partnership makes possible faithfully further God’s mission of peace, justice, healing and hope!

Yours in Christ,



The Rev’d Canon R. Terry DeForest
Priest-in-charge