

Priest-in-charge's Report to Parish Council

Anglican Church of the Incarnation, Oakville – November 6, 2011

I am aware of a kaleidoscopic whirl of events at Incarnation in the past couple of months. Sometimes it feels quite unplanned and out of control; at others the dance is quite lively and beautiful. Both can even be happening at the same time. The kaleidoscope I have been watching involves many dedicated people offering a full range of ministries in and through the church and in their daily lives. Here are some of the things which have been whirling around since Council last met: Christmas Market preparations; a Confirmation and Teen faith nurture programme proposal; receiving marvellous testimonials from parishioners as part of a greatly successful Paving the Road Ahead campaign through which we have raised sufficient funds to pay for the paving project and make a contribution towards our debt reduction; worship preparations for a range of wonderfully creative liturgical moments including the Models of the Church series, Thanksgiving, an all-ages Hallowe'en service (where I was quite proud of my home-made Scarecrow costume and of the focus on a Wizard of Oz spirituality) and an environmentally focussed programme; the Junior Chefs programme; a 12 month review of our Ministry Covenant with the Bishop; pastoral home visits with parishioners; "Fine-tuning" the diocesan vision; welcoming two pianos on loan from Oakville Suzuki Association; receiving the gifts of various talented musicians from our parish who have provided lively and beautiful music as part of our worship; preparing to extend Back to Church invitations; 8 Travelling the Road Together dessert gatherings building bonds of community and deepening our sense of why & how Incarnation matters to us; planning for the "Mind the Gap" stretch campaign; inviting the Rev'd Bill Mous, Coordinator for Social Injustice (if you can believe the misprint on the first batch of his business cards) to lead our services on December 11 during my absence; preparing for my reduced hours (50% as of November 1) in light of some 50 hours of accumulated overtime and coping with the additional 40 hours which my new job claimed even before it started!

During our "Which Future?" Visioning Workshop on October 15th we engaged in an exercise that stretches those of us (like me) who have a linear way of thinking. It was called "asset mapping" and its intent is for participants to be able to:

- identify the great range of assets for ministry which are at hand,
- cluster some of those assets together in order to address a felt need or call, and
- find their passion to develop and initiate a plan for action.

There are many things that are sound about this approach. It affirms, when we are tempted to feel depleted, impoverished or inadequate, that we are, in the Spirit, instead, quite blessed by a bounty of resources. We can, thereby, find energy, ideas and prospective resources for and partners in ministry which in our apparent depletion had not been accessible a moment earlier. It also helps us find, organically, the passion for possibilities in the gathered community. This is in stark contrast to the duty to support and act on courses of action which have been selected from a linear top-down approach.

However, from the initial feedback we are receiving after our Workshop, our experience of this exercise may reveal that I am not the only one who functions more naturally in

linear modes. And there may be some confusion about what the exercise asked of us and what we are, consequently, asking of one another in order to carry forward its energies and proposals. I look forward to meeting with the planning team soon to debrief the day.

I also look forward to discovering with you, as Parish Council, how our visioning work will continue in the future. There is much to commend the goals identified thus far:

- remaining true to the distinctive, inclusive, creative and caring worship community we have been and have striven to be;
- considering options for developing our physical resources (building & land);
- deepening the engagement of our members (new and longer-standing) more fully, more evenly in the ministries of the parish; and,
- developing the community.

There are also some questions to be asked about what we mean by “developing the community.” In conversation since that chilly day at St. Aidan’s with the EcoJustice Committee and a parishioner who recalls suggesting this goal, it seems that it has a dual focus:

- develop our parish community (healing wounds, strengthening bonds of friendship, complementing our strengths in worship with more faith nurture/spiritual development opportunities) and
- engage in community development work in the wider communities of Glen Abbey and Oakville (through continuing advocacy and entering into relationships whereby we come alongside our neighbours and those in need).

A couple of things that have stuck with me since our workshop are worth sharing. The first is the way in which the goals intersect and interact. When we approach the question as to how we will go about developing the community, we will do so as an expression of remaining true to the distinctive, inclusive, spiritual community of thoughtful seekers which so many list as an aspect of why Incarnation matters to them. We will strive to engage the wider community with the same commitments to integrity, respect and inclusiveness which we hope characterize our relationships with one another. We do not see ourselves bestowing beneficence on the benighted, we see ourselves as becoming and making friends. Secondly, I am indebted to Susan Sinclair for her contribution of an interesting image – that we are renovating a house while living in it. That image and the one of a kaleidoscope give me confidence that the whirl of activity in which we are engaged is, in fact, a purposeful movement of the Spirit.

When we re-read our mission statement, vision, core values, motto and some of the other ways in which we present ourselves to the wider world, we discovered a kind of disconnect. We are not in the same space as when these were first written. We also voiced critiques of those texts when it appeared that they implied an inward focus, mostly on ourselves. Equipped by that dual focus of the “developing the community” goal, I believe that we can indeed be a faith community which nurtures and cares for its members and which believes that we have something worth sharing with the wider world.

Respectfully submitted,

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