

THE CHURCH OF SAINT JOHN THE BAPTIST MESSENGER

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REIMAGINATION

Rebirth and New Beginnings

Lent is the time of the year that makes us especially aware of rebirth and new beginnings. The period of standstill, decay and death is conquered. Unfortunately, that does not seem to be true with the churches in Canada. On the contrary, it seems that the best time of the church lies behind us. Churches are becoming emptier and emptier. Some parishes cannot pay for the upkeep of their buildings. That means that those buildings will be turned into something else and their congregations will find other venues to gather.

One often hears that the church is not a building. I agree. With or without a building, humans will not stop their search for God. Why would a small parish need a building? Searching for God is an inner process. However, places of worship can be helpful in this quest. A church building can be a place that by its architecture invokes the religious journey of mankind and calls for prayer and contemplation.

Sometimes the hustle-bustle of daily life stops when one enters a church. One feels that one is in the presence of God.

Thus sacred places may help us in our religious journey.

I find that our building is an example of such a place. It is a beautiful sanctuary, a building that could help West Islanders to find God.

A very challenging part of Jesus' teachings is that we should rely on God for our material well-being. I interpret this message as follows: do what you are supposed to do and don't worry about the finances. That means for a parish: be concerned about the plight of the have-nots and help the wider community in their religious quest.

The question, then, for us is: how do we do so in a time when conventional Christianity does not appeal to many people?

Find an answer and the rest we may leave to God.

Geert-Jan Boudewijns

Relevance and Redundancy

"It is alarming when you take a first peek at a budget proposal for vestry and see that you are planning to go so deep in the red that the ink will start to look like blood. When crisis comes, embarrassment and alarm may be the first response, but it is what you do with that response that matters."

The above statement is taken from an article by the Reverend Canon Steven Mackison, Chair of the Finance Committee and Incumbent of St. George's – Place du Canada. The article appeared on the front page of the recent issue of *Anglican*

Montreal. Somehow it set the tone for several other reports in the same journal. The tone of these was not entirely pessimistic but will be familiar to many in our own congregation. It comes on the heels of a report distributed after the Archdeaconry Consultation Meetings held recently. The purpose of these consultations with the Anglican parishes of the West Island was with the view to "hear

and share our stories, with a view to re-imagining the presence of the Anglican Church in our own unique localities, and in the context of the whole Archdeaconry. The hope is that this collaborative process will help will individual parishes and the Archdeaconry as a whole, address the urgent and important decisions that need to be made about how best to utilize the God-given resources with which we are blessed on the West Island." The report is not long but it introduced(?) the Diocese's "Policy on Sustainable and Strategic Ministry" upon which document the discussions - consultations - were based. Our parish was represented at the Consultation Meetings by our Incumbent, Lorne, together with Angela Deslauriers, Jim Hunt and Stan Lambert.

Essentially, the Diocesan Policy document identifies three categories of parish:

- **Sustainable**

A sustainable parish ministry is defined as a congregation, cluster of congregations or regional ministry that can support



(continued overleaf)

full or part-time clergy and active lay leadership with the skills to manage the programmes and property needed to meet its own sense of mission.

- **Strategic**

A strategic parish ministry is defined as a congregation, cluster of congregations or regional ministry wherein that ministry can make a discernible difference in individual lives and in the larger world around it.

- **Unsustainable**

An unsustainable parish ministry is defined as a congregation, cluster of congregations or regional ministry that is not “strategic”, is not “mission-focused” and, in general, is depleting its financial assets to cover day-to-day operating expenses.

It does not demand a great mental effort to determine, superficially at least, into which category the parish of Saint John the Baptist falls. This begs the question with which we have been struggling, for years, it seems! In our immediate area, two churches are slated for closure (demolition?) and two others are without regular clergy. Only one congregation appears to fall into the “sustainable” category. The purpose of the Archdeaconry Consultations is obviously aimed at finding a solution which will involve “sacrificing” certain congregations in order to “consolidate” these resources elsewhere. Stretching from and including St. Stephen’s, Lachine to St. James, Hudson, there is a total of eleven Anglican parishes.

Sad as it may be, it seems unlikely that St. J. the B.s present strategies will ensure viability, in the longer term. This has been addressed extensively at Corporation and Parish Council meetings in recent years – not to mention several editorial forays over the years concerning possible directional changes in the pages of the MESSENGER!

So, where does that leave us? What do we have to offer?

As Geert mentions in his article on the first page, we have a beautiful, well-equipped building, one which is also functionally attractive – an on-site parking lot, on one level for access, for the most part, and with a fabric which is in reasonable condition. This surely is an asset which can be used to justify maintaining a congregation here. We have a basis from which to grow. However, it is a building which is now over twenty years old and it is in need of major upgrading in some areas.

If, indeed, we have access to capital presently invested, does it not make sense to use this to upgrade and modernize?

This approach, of course, will contravene the diocesan requirement expected of a “sustainable or strategic parish”. To quote, “we would be depleting our capital assets to pay for current expenses.” However, with regular ‘draw downs’ already taking place, we are on that path already. To be honest, I am not fully sure what restrictions are likely to be set by the diocese concerning access to invested funds, how much we can use and for which purpose. One thing that is certain, however, is that all assets which remain in a church’s account, should that

church close, will revert to the diocese to be used as that body sees fit. Nevertheless, seen from a different perspective, our building – sanctuaries, halls and exterior spaces – represent a major recommendation to maintaining “a viable congregation” in this place. An equally important asset is the fact that we remain blessed with a body of parishioners and an incumbent priest who are positive, and optimistically expect to worship here for years to come. We need to capitalize on these strengths, adapt as needs must and ensure that “consolidation” when it occurs will give us a fighting chance to influence whatever outcome is placed in our path.

Part of the diocesan document describes different kinds of “church”. It may or may not be enlightening at this point to consider where the Church of Saint John the Baptist fits in this scale of things - now or in the future.

- **Attractional – Come to Church**

This could be characterized by a strategy which “tries to produce events and worship gatherings that are attractive to a particular demographic.”

- **Missional – Be the Church with me**

This approach suggests “investing in people and society, living out our faith in Christ.”

- **Missional – I am the Church**

A body of people “dedicated and sent on mission who gather in community for worship, community encouragement and teaching from the Word.”

- **Consumer – I go to Church**

A church which “is seen as a dispenser of religious goods and services” where people expect to find those practices normally associated with *traditional* attendance at church, either regularly or on special occasions throughout the year.

Where do we go from here?

As in most spheres of life, we are faced with choices. It seems that the choices we have made in the past have not encouraged optimism. However, for a few years, we can continue to follow the same path but it is unlikely that it will lead to success. This can be stated with some certainty – if, for no other reason, that it is becoming clearer that the Diocese is no longer able or willing to support “unsustainable parishes.”

“When a parish ministry is found to be unable to sustain itself financially ... the Corporation in consultation with the parish council and the Diocese will work together under the direction of the Executive Archdeacon to plan for the future as appropriate.”

Obviously, any change of direction which results from modifying our current practice could, equally, lead to failure. It is also guaranteed that it will alienate some parishioners – but we must face the reality that, whether we want it or not, change in some form is on the way, probably sooner rather than later.

Preparation and Renewal

Lent was originally established for new Christians, those who had experienced a call. They were to spend forty days and forty nights preparing for their baptism. If at the end they still wanted to follow Jesus, then on Easter Eve they would be baptized as the sun was rising in the east, signalling the new era, inaugurated because of the Resurrection. It probably had a powerful significance for them, to have prepared for their vocation as Christians the same way that Jesus did for his vocation as the Messiah: forty days of introspection and self-examination. But later the Church used the forty days as a time of renewal for those who were already Christians, because at a certain point everyone in the empire became a Christian, everyone was baptized as infants. So the time of Lent was used as a time of renewal and recommitment to the Christian life – examining our lives in light of the One we are supposed to follow.

Some two thousand years ago, a man from Galilee said, "What would it profit a man if he gained the whole world and lost his soul?" Perhaps, when he made that statement, He was not only addressing it to those who heard Him, but was also looking back to a time of decision in His own life.

There is something very curious about the man from Galilee. He has captivated the imaginations of people throughout twenty centuries. He transcends time and place, culture and custom, race and language. There is something within Him that always speaks clearly to us. We see it throughout the gospels, everywhere He went, in everything He said and did. Son of God and Son of Man – we know because He became one of us. While He is the answer to all our struggles, we see Him struggling with the thing He faced. And, as He finds the way for Himself He finds the way for us as well ...

There was a mother mouse who decided to teach her children about the world. So she gathered all of her little mice and set out for a walk. They walked down the hall and turned to the right. Then they went further down the hall and took

another right. And suddenly they found themselves in front of the family cat dozing in the sunlight. The mother mouse was scared. But she didn't want to give in to her fright. So she signaled to the children to be very quiet and to follow as she began to tip toe quietly and slowly past the sleeping cat. Just as she was about to get into the clear, the cat's eyes popped open and it raised its paw. The little mice were petrified. What would their mother do? Well, just as the cat's paw started to come down, that mother mouse looked the cat right in the eye and started barking like a dog. And do you know what?

The cat was so startled and frightened that it jumped up and ran away! The mother mouse, wiped her brow, shook a little and then turned to her little mice and said, "Children, I hope you learned a valuable lesson. Sometimes it's good to know a second language!" So it is with us as Christians.

Salt and light from lamps were two essentials of the ancient world. Salt was connected with purity. No doubt

it's glistening whiteness made the connection easy. In addition, it was the most primitive of all offering to the gods. Salt was the commonest of all preservatives. It was used to keep things from going bad. The greatest quality of salt is that it lends flavor to things. The typical home in Palestine was very dark with only one circular window, perhaps not more than eighteen inches across. Lamps were essential and they were kept burning continuously. So we are supposed to shine, so that other persons might see that light and give glory to the Lord

Metaphorically, salt and light are the language of God; the language of Grace; the language of Hope – and of Love. And when this language is translated into action it can become the most beautiful language ever spoken. We're called to be salt and light – and to speak the language of God as we live our faith. We're called to live the Word.

As we approach the future before us, may we always be influenced by God's caring and leadership – for behold, He is the Lord.

*Excerpted from recent sermons, Bob Cowell, Layreader
DLP, Editor*

In the age of social media, we're being encouraged to blurt out whatever we're thinking. Radio stations, newspaper comment sections, the television news and advertisers have jumped on the bandwagon. Everyone seems to want our opinion. In a way, we're all acting like reality TV stars. Sure, we say some stupid things, but it doesn't mean our next comment or post won't be brilliant, so we keep trying. We're living in a moment where

passion rules over reason, a time dubbed the post-truth era. Hopefully, it's not too late for us to reverse course.

Information has always had a gatekeeper. Before newspaper editors, there were librarians and book publishers, and before them monks and priests, who filtered what we had access to, and determined who had something to say that was worth hearing, and who did not. The system was far from perfect. But surely it was better

than what we have now: a borderless, never ending flow of information where facts, fiction and opinion have become completely interchangeable, and there's no one to tell us what's what.

It wouldn't be such a bad thing for most of us to go back to reading the paper quietly, by ourselves, and digesting the world alone with our mouths shut, like we used to.

Julie Anne Pattee, The Gazette, February 13th 2017



Someone burned the pancakes? Moi?



Romantic Semantic

No dictionary has ever been able to satisfactorily define the difference between "COMPLETE" and "FINISHED". However, recently a Linguistics Conference was held in London, England and attended by some of the best linguists in the world. At this conference, Samsundar Balgobin, a Guyanese linguist, was the presenter and was asked to make just that very distinction. The question put to him by a colleague in the erudite audience was this.

"Some say there is no difference between 'Complete' and 'Finished'. Please explain the difference in a way that is easy to understand."



Easter Book, Baking and Craft Sale

Saturday, April 8th 9:00 am - noon.

Our book sale is very popular, however, more books are needed to make it a success. You may bring in your donations of books (paperbacks, hardcovers) magazines, C.D.'s, D.V.D.'s,) and leave them in the designated box in the hallway.

There will be Easter decorations and craft items for sale as well as Easter baking.

Baking donations will be gratefully received Friday morning, April 7th or early the 8th.

Mr. Balgobin's answered in this fashion. "When you marry the right woman, you are 'Complete'.

When you marry the wrong woman, you are 'Finished'. And, if the right one catches you with the wrong one, you are 'Completely Finished'.



Please place contributions in the MESSENGER envelope outside the Office or send to the Editor:

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Vicar's Vignette

A Lenten Check-In

You may have heard of the CBC radio program called *Cross Country Check-up*. It's a national open-line radio show that airs Sunday afternoons on CBC Radio One.



During the show callers from across Canada exchange their ideas and opinions on topics that are important to them. Their perspectives one might say represent in a small way the pulse of what many Canadians are thinking and feeling on significant issues.

Thinking of this radio show made me wonder how you the readers of this newsletter were doing with your Lenten observations so far in this season of Lent. So I thought I would check-in with you. As you know we are just about half way through the season of Lent, that time in the church calendar when we Anglicans and many others of the Christian faith, attempt to reassess, let go of, or at least re-prioritize those habits, attitudes, practices, priorities and even luxuries that over the past year have tended to draw us away from God, one another and the church, hoping that such change will draw us nearer to God, others, and the church.

So how are you doing? Have you given this Lenten observation much attention? Have you been able to identify at least one priority, practice, habit or indulgence that you know or perhaps feel is a barrier or stumbling block to a closer relationship with the God of all creation? Is it perhaps a fear, doubt, or anger that may be the cause? Have you asked God directly to help you identify what it is that would strengthen and enliven your relationship with Him and others?

If you have not paid much attention to the season of Lent so far, may I encourage you to do so now? What is one thing that you may need to let go of, or perhaps take on that will draw you closer to God? Offer it to God in faith and move forward, don't let your stumbling rule the day, preserve. "...for perseverance produces character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us" (Romans 5:4,5).

One of the things I have been trying to practice more diligently is thankfulness; that is to pay more attention to both the small and large things in my everyday life that have blessed me in one way or another; a smile, a kind word or gesture, an offer of help, an instruction or advice that, even if difficult to receive, has helped positively direct me in some way. And as I learn to be more aware of and thankful for God's blessing in and through others and circumstances, I am also endeavoring to be more consistent in offering my own words of encouragement and gratitude to others, and to act on those opportunities to help someone else whenever possible and as best I can.

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Lenten observations can be challenging but well worth the attention and effort. As the words of Jesus in Matthew 6 remind us, "Steep your life in God-reality, God-initiative, God-provisions. Don't worry about missing out. You'll find all your everyday human concerns will be met."

Yours in Christ, Lorne





Be Careful What You Wish For

An older doctor became very bored in retirement and decided to open his own medical clinic.

He put a sign up outside that said: "Dr. Geezer's clinic. Get your treatment for \$500. If not cured, get back \$1,000."

Mister Young, who was positive that this old guy didn't know beans about medicine, thought this would be a great opportunity to get \$1,000. So he went to Dr. Geezer's clinic.

Mr. Young: "Dr. Geezer, I have lost all taste in my mouth. Can you please help me ??"

Dr. Geezer: "Nurse, please bring medicine from box 22 and put 3 drops in Dr. Young's mouth."

Mr. Young: "Aaagh !! This is gasoline!"

Dr. Geezer: "Congratulations! You've got your taste back. That will be \$500."

Mr. Young got annoyed and went back after a couple of days figuring to recover his money. "I have lost my memory, I cannot remember anything."

Dr. Geezer: "Nurse, please bring medicine from box 22 and put 3 drops in the patient's mouth."

Mr. Young: "Oh, no you don't, that is gasoline!"

Dr. Geezer: "Congratulations! You've got your memory back. That will be \$500."

Mr. Young (having lost \$1000) leaves angrily and comes back after several more days. "My eyesight has become so weak – I can hardly see!!!!"

Dr. Geezer: "Well, I don't have any medicine for that so here's your \$1000 back." (giving him a \$10 bill)

Mr. Young: "But this is only \$10!"

Dr. Geezer: "Congratulations! You got your vision back! That will be \$500."

People want the front of the bus, the back of the church, and the centre of attention.

From the Mouths of Babes

A new teacher was trying to make use of her psychology courses. She started her class by saying, 'Everyone who thinks they're stupid, stand up!'

After a few seconds, Larry stood up.

The teacher said, 'Do you think you're stupid, Larry?'

'No, ma'am, but I didn't like to see you standing there all by yourself!'

Laura watched, fascinated, as her mother smoothed cold cream on her face.

'Why do you do that, mum?' she asked.

'To make myself beautiful,' said her mother, who then began removing the cream with a tissue.

'What's the matter!' asked Laura 'Are you giving up?'

With thanks to IE

Then again...

The parish priest was preoccupied with thoughts of how he was going to ask the congregation to come up with more money than they had been expecting for repairs to the church building. Therefore, he was annoyed to find that the regular organist was sick and a substitute had been brought in at the last minute. The substitute wanted to know what to play.

"Here's a copy of the service," he said impatiently. "But, you'll have to think of something to play after I make the announcement about the finances."

During the service, the parish priest paused and said, "Brothers and Sisters, we are in great difficulty; the roof repairs cost twice as much as we expected and we need \$4,000 more to pay our bills. Any of you who can pledge \$100 or more, please stand up!"

After the shortest of pauses, the substitute organist launched into the *National Anthem!*

With thanks to L.

While driving in Pennsylvania, a family caught up to an Amish carriage. The owner of the carriage obviously had a sense of humour, because attached to the back of the carriage was a hand printed sign...

'Energy efficient vehicle: Runs on oats and grass. Caution: Do not step in exhaust.'

A minister waited in line to have his car filled with gas just before a long holiday weekend. The attendant worked quickly, but there were many cars ahead of him. Finally, the attendant motioned him toward a vacant pump.

'Reverend,' said the young man, 'I'm so sorry about the delay. It seems as if everyone waits until the last minute to get ready for a long trip.' The minister chuckled, 'I know what you mean. It's the same in my business.'