

Bishop's Pastoral Letter to Vestries, 2021



Diocese of Toronto
Anglican Church of Canada

To our Clergy, Churchwardens and Parishioners

Beloved in Christ, peace and grace be with you.

Grow! You may remember that in my letter to you last year, I invited each community to embrace the essence of our diocesan strategic plan, *Growing in Christ*. The invitation was simple...grow! Well, none of us could have imagined the scope with which we would have to adjust, change, turn, accommodate, and innovate in 2020. Almost every aspect of how we do Church would need to be transformed: from worship to administration, from pastoral care to sacramental ministry, from finance to stewarding buildings and property. On Sunday, March 15th we closed the doors of our buildings and we were jettisoned into another way of gathering and being the Church.

Parishes small and large, rural and urban turned to online worship, telephone ministry, driveway conversations, pre-recording and livestreaming. We thought we would be back in our buildings by Easter. My, how we were wrong about that. Maybe by Pentecost things would be normal again, we thought. Summer turned into fall. A partial opening under strict guidelines would give way to a second wave that would carry us through Advent and Christmas, Epiphany and now into Lent. Through it all we have learned to live outside our comfort zone and grow. Like being tossed into the deep end of the pool we are learning to swim.

The Jubilee offered by the Diocese in 2020 helped to shore up a faltering financial confidence. Many parishes report that online worship and programming is reaching a wider audience. Some parishes tell us that financial support and donations are holding steady. Clergy tell me that there is a growing trust, cooperation, and companionship with colleagues. Many parishes speak of collaborating with neighbouring communities. We have also been wrestling with how to serve those who are falling through the cracks of our social structures and safety nets, particularly those who live in precarious housing, grapple with food insecurity, mental health issues and domestic violence.

The murder of George Floyd on May 25, 2020 thrust us into the depths of confronting anti-black and systemic racism. Each year at vestry we ask you to consider supporting a social justice initiative. In 2021, we invite you to support the motion on [*Committing Ourselves to Anti-Racism*](#). The initiatives that are outlined give all of us the opportunity to be agents of dismantling racism in all of its forms. We are called to change. Throughout this time of pandemic, we are doing more than just treading water... we are growing. I believe we are growing in trust of one another, and deeper still, in trust that God has this whole situation in hand. And trust calls us to be faithful and to be prepared.

As you gather for your vestry meeting, likely online, I want to say two things. The first is to express my profound gratitude for your faithfulness, hard work, creativity, and innovative ways thus far in this pandemic. I am thankful for the tireless leadership of our clergy; bishops, priests, and deacons. I am moved beyond words by the ministry of our lay leaders who move mountains to keep the church moving. Thank you.

The second thing is, be prepared. We hear this summons often in scripture. *In the wilderness, prepare the way of the Lord*, cries the prophet. *I go to prepare a place for you*, Jesus says to his disciples. *Preach the word, be ready in season and out of season* writes Paul to Timothy. As circumstances begin to change, as the vaccine begins to take a hold for the better, I hope that you will take as much time planning for a return as you did when our doors closed in March of last year. Coming back will take a special kind of care and effort. It will take time to allay fears, it will take energy to coax the community to move forward in new ways. It will take a vision steeped in the Gospel of Jesus Christ to lift the eyes and hearts of a weary people.

And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith. Galatians 6.9-10

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "+ Andrew Toronto". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

The Rt. Rev. Andrew J. Asbil
Bishop of Toronto

The Right Reverend Jenny Andison
Area Bishop of York-Credit Valley



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A Pastoral Letter to Vestry 2021

January 6, 2021
The Feast of the Epiphany

But the Lord will be your everlasting light, your God will be your splendor. Isaiah 60:19

My sisters and brothers in Christ,

I am writing this on the great Feast of the Epiphany, when we remember and rejoice in the fact that the wise men worshipped the young Jesus as the Light of the World. As the first non-Jews to realize who Jesus is, the wise men boldly proclaim that the gospel is for all nations and all peoples, and that Jesus doesn't just make local claims relevant only to the children of Israel, but global claims, on the lives of *all* people, from Mississauga to Mauritius. What wonderfully good news: God sent his son to all the peoples of the world, not just a select few. In the York-Credit Valley Area, that good news is marvellously lived out in the global diversity found in our pews (and now online!).

Our interconnectedness as a global family has been brutally highlighted in 2020 as we battled with the devastation of the COVID-19 pandemic. And while you don't need me to tell you about the painful and deadly impact that this virus has had on the world, our city, our churches and our own lives, I do want to encourage you with how Anglicans across our Diocese have risen to the challenges now set before us. I have heard of and seen the creative online offerings of worship, Messy Church and Alpha on Zoom, meals and food still being provided to the homeless, more phone calls to the lonely and isolated, and money raised for FaithWorks. Through it all, it has been a joy to see how you have all partnered with the Holy Spirit during the twists and turns of this past year.

On the occasion of your Annual Vestry Meeting, I particularly want to thank all of you who serve in formal leadership roles in your parishes (as Wardens and Treasurers) and of course, your parish clergy, too. When you were recruited for your role, I am pretty sure that it was not mentioned that a global pandemic was on the way! Finances are being significantly stretched, workload seems to have doubled, and some parishes are now unsure of what their future holds. In the midst of this anxiety and exhaustion, your service to Christ still ascends to our Heavenly Father as a fragrant offering. Thank you so very much.

MISSION: To worship God and proclaim Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit and to embody—in word and action—God's reconciling love, justice, compassion and liberation—through which knowledge of God's reign is extended.

I also commend to your prayerful care our [Diocesan Social Justice Vestry Motion](#). This important motion acknowledges that anti-Black racism is a sinful reality in our lives, our society and in our churches and pledges us, through the grace of God, to work towards the dismantling of all forms of personal and institutional racism.

This is my last letter to you as your Area Bishop. I was consecrated as a bishop four years ago on the Feast of the Epiphany, and it has been a singular privilege to serve in York-Credit Valley, taking with me a treasure trove of wonderful experiences of watching the living God move and be active in your lives and in your parishes. While it has come as a surprise, to both you and to me, that God has called me to St. Paul, Bloor Street, I am grateful to be continuing my episcopal ministry in gospel partnership with all of you.

I would urge you during this coming year, as the pandemic continues to unfold and the York-Credit Valley Area goes through a season of transition, to cling to the Lord Jesus Christ, be steadfast in prayer, and to persevere in seeking ways to reach out evangelistically, both online and in person, to all those who are spiritually hungry in our neighbourhoods.

Please know that I will continue to hold you all in prayer this coming year. This year offers both deep challenges and the promise that the God who reveals Godself in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, will never leave us or forsake us.



Peace,

+ Jennifer Andison

The Right Reverend Jennifer Andison
Area Bishop of York-Credit Valley
Bishop Suffragan of Toronto