

RECTOR'S REPORT

In the fall of 2022, the Diocese of Toronto embarked upon a visioning process to meet the challenges and opportunities of the next five years. The process is called *Cast the Net* and involved consultation with over a thousand clergy and laity from across the diocese. You can read more about this process on the diocesan website (toronto.anglican.ca) under the "ABOUT US" tab. The work of *Cast the Net* will help define and guide the ministry of the diocese, and as such, our own parish, in the years to come.

To this end, I want to use this space to highlight some of the key elements that have emerged so far:

1) **A Mission Statement.** The following was presented to Synod in the fall and seeks to encapsulate the vision for the diocese at the present moment:

"Followers of Jesus, inspired by the Holy Spirit, serve the world God loves!"

- We are disciples of Jesus Christ, whose Good News is the joy and challenge at the heart of our common life.
- We are renewed daily in our spiritual lives and share our faith with others.
- We seek justice for all, walk alongside those in need, and respond with loving service and prophetic advocacy.
- We support and encourage faithful and fruitful ministry by all who serve the life of the church.
- We live and work as the Body of Christ, each member connected to the whole, and each valued for their unique gifts.

2) **20 Calls to the Diocese.** The following were endorsed by Synod in the fall of 2023:

A. RENEWING SPIRITUALITY. We are renewed daily in our spiritual lives and share our faith with others. In that spirit, all parts of the Diocese of Toronto are called to:

1. Enter into a Season of Spiritual Renewal to deepen personal and collective discipleship.
2. Reinvigorate and recommit to children's, youth, family, and intergenerational ministries.
3. Share and use resources to enliven worship, faith formation, spiritual practice, and evangelism.

B. INSPIRING FAITH IN ACTION. We seek justice for all, walk alongside those in need, and respond with loving service and prophetic advocacy. In that spirit, all parts of the Diocese of Toronto are called to:

4. Recognize and act on opportunities to participate in God's healing work in the world.
5. Make explicit connections between following Jesus and working for justice and peace.
6. Strengthen Indigenous ministry; engage non-Indigenous Anglicans in reconciliation work.
7. Take, sustain and communicate actions that promote diversity, equity, inclusion and anti-racism.
8. Intensify advocacy and action in response to the climate crisis.

C. REIMAGINING MINISTRY. We support and encourage faithful and fruitful ministry by all who serve the life of the church. In that spirit, all parts of the Diocese of Toronto are called to:

9. Actively embrace collaboration among congregations and innovation in new forms of ministry.

10. Better reflect the diversity of our communities in both congregations and clergy.
11. Understand the changing needs of lay leaders in congregations and support them in their work.
12. Continue and enhance support for all ordained people.
13. Enable and celebrate the work of ministries focused on service in the world.
14. Rethink clergy discernment, formation, and deployment for the church of the future.
15. Introduce and use new ways to measure and nurture congregational health and effectiveness.

D. TRANSFORMING DIOCESAN CULTURE. We live and work as the Body of Christ, each member connected to the whole, and each valued for their unique gifts. In that spirit, all parts of the Diocese of Toronto are called to:

16. Cultivate an understanding of the diocese as a dynamic net of shared relationships.
17. Continue assessing recent diocesan leadership changes and adjust as necessary.
18. Adopt an integrated, theologically-informed approach to property management.
19. Ensure follow-through on this report, including implementation methods and metrics.
20. Invest in the vision with existing and new resources, using sound Christian stewardship principles.

- 3) **A Season of Spiritual Renewal.** One of the major themes that emerged from the *Cast the Net* process was a strongly stated desire for spiritual renewal. This is listed as the first of the “Calls to the Diocese” above, but is significant enough to warrant its own bullet point here. Anglicans across the diocese are hungry for renewed spiritual vitality in both their parishes and their lives. And the diocese has set aside the next two year (November 2023 to November 2025) and \$400,000 to support this time of spiritual renewal and growth.

As we embark upon another year of ministry in our own small corner of the diocese, I encourage you to read and reflect on the *Cast the Net* process, especially the Mission Statement, the “20 Calls” and the Season of Spiritual Renewal. Which parts excite you? Which parts do you think we are already doing well? Which parts do you think St. Olave’s can grow into more fully?

From my point of view, as the Rector of St. Olave’s, the part that excites me the most is spiritual renewal. I see spiritual renewal happening in our parish already. I see it in the hearts of those who are new to the Christian faith (or new to the Anglican tradition), who have enthusiastically joined our community in recent years. I sense it in the conversations of our weekly Wednesday morning Bible Study group and at the numerous other education events throughout the year. I hear it in the private conversations I have with many of you. And because I believe that spiritual renewal is already happening at St. Olave’s, I think it is also an area we can lean into even more.

One of the best ways we can measure spiritual engagement and renewal is through attendance at worship. Yes, of course, spirituality is about much more than simply coming to church. Having a vibrant faith means developing a regular prayer life, giving generously for mission and ministry, serving the poor and marginalized, to name just a few. These things have been highlighted in the Stewardship Committee’s Rule of Life video series, but I think the most important one of all is communal worship. Since the very beginning, Christians have gathered. It is in gathering that we are strengthened for the journey, and we strengthen others. Community is at the heart of the Christian experience. And when we are together, Christ is with us.

Attending church regularly is a discipline that isn't as easy today as in previous generations. There are so many competing choices and demands on our time. It can even feel like a sacrifice to make time for church, especially when we are tired and feeling run down. But I believe it's a sacrifice we are called to make. And it's one that, if we persist, will reap countless benefits for us, for our families, for the others who come, and for the greater community in which we live.

I believe that community is at the centre of the Christian life. And I think, frankly, it's much harder to enjoy the many fruits of the Christian faith if we become too far removed from our fellow Christian travellers. Worshipping, laughing, eating, praying and just being together are at the heart of what it means to be a Christian, even in our fast-paced, technologically advanced world. We have invested heavily in developing an online ministry for those who live far away or who are unable to attend physically. And we are delighted that this form of ministry is supporting those who can't be here. But for those of us who are able, coming to church is an investment in our own spiritual health that reaps incalculable benefits.

It's been heartening to see some growth in our attendance since the fall. I think this is a sign of both greater comfort in gathering (post-Covid) but also a sign of spiritual renewal. Of course, attendance statistics are not everything. They are, on one hand, just a number on a page. But having said that, statistics are very important. Because what looks like just a number on a page is, in fact, something much more beautiful. It is an image of a community that is coming together for mutual support and friendship, to worship and pray, and to be the Body of Christ in the world. As we move ahead through the remainder of 2024, I sincerely hope and pray that we will become, more fully, a church that gathers, that comes together often, that is a visible sign to the world and to each other that Christ lives and reigns among us.

Reflecting on the spiritual growth of the past year, I am enormously grateful for our lay leaders. Janice Douglas, Sharm Powell, Allan Taylor and Carol Ambler, along with Annis Tebbutt our Treasurer, are exceptional leaders and have provided our parish with excellent guidance. I could not have asked for a better team of skilled and experienced people to help us lead the ministry of the parish forward. I am happy to reappoint Janice Douglas as Rector's Warden. I cannot adequately express how fortunate we are to have the skills and commitment of Janice. She uses her diverse skill set and devotion to the parish to help us grow and thrive in too many ways to list here. I am happily reappointing Allan Taylor, an 8:30 a.m. parishioner, as Deputy Rector's Warden. Allan brings a vast array of skills to the position, especially related to building issues, and brings a keen business mind to the task. Sharm Powell is again allowing her name to stand for People's Warden and Carol Ambler for Deputy People's Warden. Both have financial backgrounds and have been exceptional members of the leadership team, bringing their many professional and personal skills to the job. Annis Tebbutt has been reappointed by the wardens as our treasurer and we continue to be blessed by her dedication to this vital role. Annis gives countless hours behind the scenes to this role and I am deeply grateful. With this group of strong leaders, we are well positioned to continue our trajectory of growth and spiritual renewal in the years to come.

Our staff contributes to the growth and health of our parish in many ways. Jeremy continues to grow into the role of Director of Music, having been appointed to the permanent position in May 2023 after a competitive search process. He has led the choir in producing some memorable choral pieces this year, especially at Good Friday and the Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols. Judy, our parish administrator, diligently and patiently keeps St. Olave's moving forward with efficiency and skill. And Siobhan's dedication to the spiritual nurture of the parish's children is exceptional. Our Sexton, Dave, continues his work, currently at reduced hours at his request. I remain ever grateful for the very fine and dedicated staff of our parish.

And I sincerely wish to thank you, the parishioners of St. Olave's, for your prayers, your kind and encouraging words, and your generosity throughout 2023. Many of you hold volunteer positions in the church, support our ministries by attending services and events, and offer untold hours of volunteer service. Thank you for everything you give and all that you do for our parish.

May the year ahead be a time of spiritual renewal for all of us. And may God bless the efforts and endeavours of our parish as we seek to do his will.

Respectfully submitted,

The Rev'd Canon Rob Mitchell
Rector VI