

Rector's Report

Respectfully submitted by The Rev'd Canon Rob Mitchell, Rector VI

Over the next eleven years, our parish will be marking several anniversaries. Perhaps the most significant will be the year 2036. That year will mark 150 years of St. Olave's existence. On July 18, 1886, a group of Anglicans, under the leadership of the Rev'd Henry Softley, held the first service in the boardroom of the Bolt Works, a factory which produced bolts, rivets, fasteners and nuts at the corner of Queensway and Windermere. But there are other important anniversaries coming our way too. The following year, 2037, will be the 150th anniversary of the completion of our first church building, which was located on east side of Windermere, a little north of the Queensway. And that same year, 2037, will coincidentally be the 100th anniversary of the completion of our current building, which was dedicated on March 21, 1937.

If I haven't totally confused you yet, let me introduce yet another significant anniversary. And this one is fast approaching. While our current building wasn't completed until 1937, our parish began holding services at this site a full ten years earlier. On February 18, 1927, the basement (our current parish hall) was dedicated for use as a church. And so, 2027 will be our centenary at the corner of Windermere and Ostend.

It seems to me that this is an anniversary worth celebrating. 100 years of outreach, preaching, fellowship, community, baptisms, confirmations, weddings, funerals, mission and service at 360 Windermere Avenue is no small feat. And I would like to see us make the most of this anniversary. Over the coming months, I hope to see the formation of a committee that would begin planning events to celebrate this anniversary and remind our community that we've been here for 100 years, and plan to be here for the next 100 years too.

One major opportunity to remind our neighbours that we are preparing for many more years of ministry on this site will be, God willing, the beginning of the construction of our elevator addition. As you know, much work has been done over the past several years to bring forward a vision of an elevator that would make all three levels (basement, ground level and main floor) accessible to all people. In October of 2025 the Accessibility Committee presented drawings of an addition to the Windermere side of our building that would house the elevator. Users would enter from the ground level and could either go up into the narthex or down into the parish hall. The committee and I believe this concept is the right one for our parish. And we are excited and hopeful that, over the coming months, we will raise enough funds to begin work on a final set of drawings before obtaining quotes from contractors. I want to express, here, my deep and ongoing gratitude to the Accessibility Committee co-chairs, Henry Jeens and Allan Taylor, and to all the members of the committee who have put so much time and effort into moving this project forward.

Looking back over the year 2025 at St. Olave's, there have been many moments of joy, achievement and even sadness. A small group of parishioners and I attended the "Lift Up Our Hearts" service at the Cathedral on Saturday, March 22. This was the first of five such services held throughout the year, and was a part of the two-year Season of Spiritual Renewal that our diocese undertook from Epiphany 2024 to Epiphany 2026. Throughout this time, we were invited to participate in the renewal of the church through widespread prayer, deeper engagement with Holy Scripture, commitment to worship, and sharing the faith through word and deed. These four things are key markers of renewal in churches, and we can all make them a reality in our lives and in our parishes. I hope we will each continue to put them into practise in our daily lives.

Our Lenten workshop in 2025 was an original and creative one. Grace in Every Stroke: Lenten Prayer Through Calligraphy ran on Tuesday nights from March 11 to April 18. More than 20 people joined parishioner and artist Elizabeth Jackson-Hall to explore how the act of writing can be a form of prayer. We each chose a prayer or scripture verse to write using calligraphy, drawing us deeper into meditation on the meaning of the words. Thank you, Elizabeth, for this engaging and fun form of prayer during Lent!

As part of the aforementioned season of Spiritual Renewal, parishioners Jane Boudebab and Janice Douglas led a 9-week series throughout spring based on the Very Rev. Dr. Stephen Hance's book, *Everyday Witness*. Stephen is the Rector of the Cathedral and the Dean of Toronto. The sessions were held on Wednesday nights starting April 30. It was a very rewarding experience to discuss the book in a small group setting.

On May 25, we dedicated 12 new basement windows. We are blessed at St. Olave's by many generous supporters. The windows were given by Carol Drummond (1 window), Jelana Duncan (1 window), Jack Suttaby (1 window), Bob Kennedy and Mark Baker (1 window), the Bespalov and Jackson-Hall Families (1 window), the Olabode-McDonald Family (1 window), Lynn Rands and the ACW (1 window), an anonymous donor (2 windows), John & Martha Drake (1 window), Chris McCulloch (1 window), and the ACW, Michael Ball, Bette Birmingham, Jane Boudebab, Heather Cosgrave, Michael Jones, Patricia Mills, Maureen Oldham, Margaret Roze, Mary Rusbridge, Judith Sher and Sheila Tait (1 window).

I continue my role as Regional Dean for the Parkdale-Toronto West Deanery. The deanery stretches from the Humber River to Spadina Avenue, and from Lake Ontario to Eglinton, and includes all the Anglican parishes, schools and institutions within that area. As part of this role, I chair monthly meetings of the clergy ("Clericus"), attend strategic meetings with other regional deans and bishops, and offer some pastoral care and assistance to clergy colleagues. With great help from Janice Douglas, I produce a bi-monthly electronic newsletter for the deanery called *Sundry Places*.

It was a delight for our parish to host the second annual Deanery Evensong on June 1. Over 100 people attended, including many deanery clergy and choristers from other parishes. A reception was held in the parish hall under the leadership of Michelle Mayers-Van Herk and with food contributions from many parishes. Thank you to all who helped and attended.

I was sad to receive notice of Judy Beal's retirement at the end of July. Judy worked for the parish for 29 years as our Parish Administrator. Though we were sad to see her leave the position, we are, of course, very happy for her as she begins a new chapter in her life. Her last day in the office was October 2, and we celebrated her ministry after the service on Sunday, October 5.

I was very pleased to welcome back the Rev. Dr. PJ Carefoote on Holy Cross Day (September 14). He had been serving the parishes of St Mary Magdalene's and St Matthias since January, following the unexpected death of their priest, the Rev. Canon Eric Beresford. We are very fortunate to have someone of his skill, experience and grace in our midst!

Over the course of five weeks (Oct 22- Nov 19), a group of parishioners and I read and reflected on the life and work of Henri Nouwen. Nouwen was a Dutch Catholic priest, professor, writer and theologian. After nearly two decades of teaching (Notre Dame, Yale Divinity School and Harvard Divinity School), he went on to work and live at the L'Arche Daybreak community in Richmond Hill. He wrote 40 books and is widely regarded as one of the greatest spiritual writers of our time. We began by attending a one-man play based on his life. This was followed by four weekly meetings where we discussed his most famous book, *The Return of the Prodigal Son*. I hope to make book studies a regular part of the annual pattern of church life including one in the fall and one in the spring.

On Friday, November 7, and Saturday, November 8, Andrewes Sissons and I attended Synod at the Sheraton Parkway Toronto North in Richmond Hill. Synod meets every two years and deliberates on the business and ministry of the Diocese. This includes passing a two-year budget, voting on various motions, and hearing about creative and new ministries throughout the diocese. My friend and colleague, the Reverend Canon Jesse Parker of St. John's, Port Hope, and I made a presentation to Synod as the co-leaders of the Areas and Area Councils Working Group. The AACWG was formed in May 2023 and tasked with recommending changes to diocesan structures in light of the shift from the former Episcopal Area structure (which included Area Bishops and Area Councils) to the new episcopal leadership model (which features five Archdeacons).

Areas and Area Councils are mandated under Canons 43 and 44. Canon 43 states that the Diocese shall be divided into geographical "Areas." It also states that the Diocesan Bishop may designate Suffragan Bishops (called Area Bishops) to exercise episcopal office within these Areas. In recent years, the Areas included York-Credit Valley, Trent-

Durham, York-Scarborough, and York-Simcoe. Canon 44 states that each Area shall have an Area Council. Among other things, Area Councils acted in an advisory capacity to the Area Bishop, offered grants, organized Area events, and hired Area staff. Both Canon 43 and Canon 44 were suspended at Synod 2023 and resuspended at Synod 2025. In late 2022, five Archdeacons were created (East, West, Central, North and South) and four Archdeacons and one Canon Administrator were appointed to serve in them. St Olave's is in the South Archdeaconry, and Cheryl Palmer is our Archdeacon.

The recommendations Canon Parker and I made to Synod include:

1. Non-Replacement of Former Area Councils: The Diocese will not replace Area councils with analogous structures (e.g., Archdeaconry Councils, Deanery Councils).
2. Project Funding Structure: The Bishops of the Diocese will each be provided with a budget to fund parish ministry projects that do not meet the requirements of existing grants, and that may have been otherwise funded by Area Council grants. The focus will be on capital projects like, for example, website design, signage, livestreaming equipment, and other parish initiatives and projects that do not meet the requirements of other existing grants. The Regional Deans will work with applicants to ensure that their requests are reasonable and in accordance with the parameters set out above.
3. FaithWorks Funding: FaithWorks funds previously apportioned to the Area Councils for outreach and advocacy projects will be folded back into the FaithWorks annual budget.
4. Discretionary Budgets for Regional Deans: The Regional Deans will each be allocated a budget of \$2000 per year to use at their discretion for fostering collegiality among clergy, and promoting ministry and collaboration within their deanery.
5. Deaneries, led by their Regional Dean and Clericus, will develop collaborative ministry plans and goals that suit their context. Examples include, but are not limited to:
 - i. Deaneries could convene at least one meeting per year to discuss ministry priorities within the deanery. This might include guest speakers, open forums, and other forms of fostering creativity and inspiring new ideas for collaborative ministry within the deanery.
 - ii. Deanery-wide worship services.
 - iii. Deanery Christian Education Teams comprised of clergy and lay faithful.
 - iv. Collaborative projects for faith formation and evangelization.
 - v. Publication of devotionals.

If practicable and desired, two or more deaneries could pool resources and work together on these or any other initiative.

6. Develop a Job Description for Regional Deans: A clear and detailed job description for Regional Deans will be developed and will include all the roles and responsibilities expected, including those detailed above.

We recommended to Synod that, following a period of implementation beginning on January 1, 2026, our proposal be evaluated in the early spring of 2027 at a meeting of the Bishops, Archdeacons, Canon Administrator and Regional Deans. Following which, changes to the proposal can be made, if necessary. Synod 2027 will be asked to consider striking Canon 43 and Canon 44 from the Canons of the Diocese.

Later in the month of November, I participated in the ordination to the priesthood of our former Deacon, the Rev'd Dr. Jim Leatch. Since late 2024, Jim has been assigned to the parish of St John the Baptist, Dixie, where he is completing a two-year curacy. It was a delightful occasion and I was honored to be one of his "Presenters." We hope and pray that he might one day find his way back to us.

Our annual Christmas meal was held on December 6. We had the biggest crowd since we began these meals. The hall was packed with happy diners, and we all enjoyed the music of Andrewes Sissons' band, 5 Neat Guys. Thank you to all the people who helped organize and plan the meal, and to the many volunteers and table hosts who made it such a success!

Lisa Tait, our new Parish Administrator, started only a short time before Christmas. The timing of her start date ensured it was a baptism by fire! But Lisa is a fast learner and has already brought many good ideas to the role. We are very grateful for her presence among us and look forward to her being with us for the next 29 years! As well as being as our part-time P.A., Lisa also continues as the part-time Parish Administrator for St. Matthew's, Islington.

It was great sadness that we lost Bob Ragsdale in January of 2025. Bob was a parishioner since the 1950s, was frequently a warden, and led several committees and initiatives of the parish over those 70 years. Among many things, he was a founder and long-time committee member of the Second Century Mission Fund. Bob's funeral was on January 25 at St. Olave's. We also lost other beloved members of our parish including June Floyd (the wife of John Floyd), Joan Funnell, Bernadette D'Arcy, Muriel Casey, John Paton (husband of Mary Rusbridge), Bonnie Graham (wife of Barry Graham), and in January of this year, Ruth Morgan (wife of Scott Morgan). May they rest in peace and rise with Christ in glory.

Our average Sunday attendance in 2025 was 82, and our average weekly attendance was 121. These numbers include both onsite attendance (people who physically entered the building) and online attendance (people who watched our YouTube services

or participated in Morning or Evening Prayer, Compline or other Zoom services). Online attendance is difficult to record with accuracy. But the metric we use in this diocese is one hour of viewing equals one person in attendance. So, the longer you watch our services online, the higher our attendance will be!

I am enormously grateful for our wardens (Janice Douglas, Sharm Powell, Allan Taylor and Henry Jeens) and our Treasurer (Annis Tebbutt). I could not have asked for a better team of skilled and experienced people to help lead the parish. I am happy to reappoint Janice Douglas as Rector's Warden. Janice uses her many skills and devotion to the parish to help us grow and thrive. 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. Sharm has a financial background and has been an exceptional member of the leadership team, bringing her many professional and personal skills to the job. Henry Jeens is allowing his name to stand again for Deputy People's Warden. Henry is an engineer by trade, and the co-chair of our Accessibility Committee. He brings many skills and experience to Corporation and is a valued member of our team. 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 and I am deeply grateful.

Our staff contributes to the growth and health of our parish in many ways. Jeremy Tingle has led our choir in producing some memorable choral pieces this year, especially at Good Friday and the Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols. And our choir section leads, Thera Barclay, Scott Garbiel and José Maldonado, bring beauty and joy to our services. Lisa Tait, our parish administrator, diligently and patiently keeps St. Olave's moving forward with efficiency and skill. Siobhan Carmichael's dedication to the spiritual nurture of the parish's children is exceptional. And our Sexton, Romario Maharaj, keep our building clean and running smoothly. 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 2025. 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. Please continue to pray for St. Olave's, for our leaders, and, if I may be so bold, for me.