

## **MOVING ON**

**OCTOBER 14, 2007**

Well here we are: two congregations meeting jointly as a Pastoral Charge to move along the process towards selecting a new spiritual leader for the parish. Our joint committee has worked very hard along with the representatives from Belleville Presbytery to think through a number of questions: what challenge have we to offer a new minister, how do we describe our communities and our congregations, what are our strengths and our weaknesses, what are our dreams for our parish and what as congregations are we seeking in a new minister.

This Joint Needs Assessment document, which we will accept or reject at the meeting to follow, distills all the above in an easy to read form. This document will be on our web site for all to see and will be sent to ministers enquiring about possible ministry with us. It is also a document for us as parishioners. We can reflect on the challenges and opportunities here and use it to enhance our own ministry in these places.

We are in that period which I label “Moving On”. Is it not usually the way that things go along much the same for some period and then something happens to jar us into attention, forcing us to face the reality that all is not as it was. We are at that place in our life here together. For sixteen years the spiritual leadership offered by the minister was ongoing. But now, there is change with an interim minister and the pending selection of a new person to come and share our spiritual journey together. Is this real scary stuff or is it the beginning of a new adventure together? How we react is up to each of us.

There is an episode in the Book of the prophet Jeremiah which may help us. Israel has been torn apart and conquered by King Nebuchadnezzar who has taken all the leadership away into captivity in Babylon. Those in captivity are not sure what to do. Should they just suspend all decisions until they return or should they try to adjust to the new reality. Jeremiah writes that God does not recommend suspending their lives or playing the waiting game. Sink your roots in the new place, build your house and get on with it. Seek God in the new reality and God will be there.

Jeremiah is aware that time does not stand still; neither can anything be the same as it was before the change. Continue to be the people of God in this new time and worship God in your new place. Not only pray for yourselves, but pray for those around you and for the welfare of the new land in which you find yourself. So said Jeremiah to a bewildered people.

There are hints of this same sentiment in the story of Abraham, Lot and Lot’s wife. Don’t look back as you flee the city or you will turn into a pillar of salt is the warning. However, Lot’s wife can not resist one last look at the city and life she was leaving behind. She turns into a pillar of salt says the passage. You and I will not turn into salt but we know instinctively that we can not go back to the way it was. The loss of a loved one teaches us this lesson – it will never be the same as it was, we lament, and it is true.

Lot's wife missed out on the great adventure ahead because she always looked back. Look ahead, God proclaims to us, for as in the past, I am with you in the future. Come on, take up your courage and follow me into the new dawn.

It is so easy to stop and put one's life on hold. I will finish my degree someday; I will paint the garage next year; I will travel once I retire; I will volunteer with that group when I have time; when I make enough money, then watch me. We always have multiple excuses not to get at the things we keep putting off. Do we blame circumstances for our lack of action or our own irrational behaviour?

Jeremiah, the prophets and the psalmists encourage men and women to take charge of their lives and not give up.

This message is clearly for us today as we review together this document of intent, our intent to move forward and seek new leadership for our parish. Look to the future and see what God has in store for us. Why not assume it will be a great adventure.

In psalm 66, we read these words: "Bless our God, O peoples, let the sound of his praise be heard, who has kept us among the living, and has not let our feet slip. For you, O God, have tested us; you have tried us as silver is tried. Yet, you have brought us forth to a spacious place."

I love this picture drawn by the psalmist. True, we are sorely tested by day to day living and by the events which are beyond our control, but in the end you, O God, bring us to a spacious place. Most parts of the world are very crowded, with very little personal space. Here the picture is of God coming with us to a spacious place, a place of peace and safety, a place of beauty.

Think of Christ hanging on the cross between two dying thieves. One of them rails at Jesus. If you are the Son of God, get down from the cross and get us down as well. Save us if you have the power. The second thief chastises the other saying that the two of them are getting what they deserve. Then, he asks Jesus to remember him when Jesus comes into his kingdom. This thief was facing his darkest day, suffering great pain and wondering if there even was a life after death. In the midst of his blackest hour, he meets Jesus and pleads these famous words: Remember me Lord.

Jesus is not flippant with the man. He does not brush him off or say "O sure, I will remember you". Instead, he offers the man the greatest of opportunities ever offered to anyone. "Today", said Jesus, "you will be with me in paradise." Paradise in Jesus' time, was deemed to be that special garden or space, set aside for the king to walk in peace and safety. It harkens back to the psalmist words of God taking us to a spacious place.

With no conditions given or any checking of references, Jesus offers him the honour of this day being with him in paradise. The worst day of his life opened the door for the thief to the love and warmth of Jesus the Christ. Today you will be with me in the spacious place.

So, how should we view the task before us? Should we come to it reluctantly, complaining of the long process we were stuck with by head office and presbytery, should we remind everyone that it is not as easy as it used to be to just go and hire a minister?

I think rather we should review this report, the fruit of the labour of many of our colleagues and see if this describes our dreams for the Prince Edward North Pastoral Charge. We are not just looking just for ourselves, but for our families and neighbours present and future.

All of us in this church today should be planning for ministry, that sharing of the gospel of Jesus Christ with one another and with our community. Our time together can be a time of recommitment to one another and a sharing of our aspirations and dreams. It is to a committed group of seekers and believers that we call a new minister. All of us are in this ministry of Jesus Christ, each of us with different gifts and talents, each seeking to share our story of how God has touched our life. In love and unity, we move forward to welcome a new minister.

Moving on is never as easy as it sounds. Like Lot's wife, we stop and longingly look back to what was, what we know and understand.

Move forward, St. Paul would say to us as he did in his letters to so many churches 2000 years ago. Be not afraid, for God is with you as are your brothers and sisters in the churches around the world. Do everything in love and with respect for one another's feelings and thoughts. Remember

St. Paul's famous 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 13 passage about love:

“If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.

Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Love never ends....So faith, hope, love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.”

As we move on today to review and hopefully accept this report and throughout the search for a new minister, let us be patient and kind with one another open to the ministry of those around us. Let us not lose hope, nor be overly anxious or impatient for God knows our needs and will be there with us as we conclude this search.

Prince Edward North Pastoral Charge is on the move into the future, led by God and blessed with the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Thanks be to God for the challenges and opportunities for service he places before us in this place. Amen.

Rev. Gary Magarrell