

Dear Friends,

Following the wonderful events of our 175th anniversary, we entered the 2020 year with hearts renewed and eager to grow our ministry. Initially our year began on a high note as we celebrated Ruth May's reception of the Order of the Diocese of Toronto. Ruth's nomination and induction was well deserved. Ruth's ministry exemplifies the generosity of this parish and the dedication you have to this parish church. Your commitment to the life of this faith community was further exemplified by your strength and witness in what turned out to be one of the most challenging times in recent decades.

Little did we know our lives would be upended by a pandemic when we began this year. Although we received initial reports of an epidemic in China in the early weeks of January, most of us continued on as usual. Inspired by our 175th anniversary events in 2019, many of us came together to envision the future of this parish as we continue our journey of faith.

Wanting to tap into the energy of 2019, I invited a diverse group of parishioners to form our Mission and Evangelism team. The purpose of the ministry team is to reflect on what it means to be church not only within our parish community, but also in the community of Bolton and beyond, and to imagine new ways for us to go beyond the walls of this church and engage others through word and action in the good news. The Mission and Evangelism team spent considerable time in 2020 examining our parish ministry and life and discerning what God is calling us to do in the years to come. Over the next few weeks and months we will begin to see the fruit of that team's labours as we launch some new ministries. What has been evidently clear to the group is the need for us to move beyond a model of church that is focused on nurturing and sustaining itself, to a church compelled to serve others. As disciples of Jesus Christ, we gather each Sunday not simply as a club or a social organisation, but rather as a people called by God, fed by Word and Sacrament, and compelled by the Holy Spirit to go out and share the good news with all. In other words, we're not here for ourselves, but for others. As Jesus told his disciples, so he tells us, "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13:34-35)

As the Mission and Evangelism team was praying and discerning the future direction of our church's ministry, God was calling up many others in our community to share in our ministry. Several of you came to me in early January yearning to serve the community of Bolton. John Marshall approached me with the idea of community garden. Inspired by an earlier sermon preached by the Rev. Beverly Williams of Flemingdon Park Ministries, John offered to start and lead our own community garden. After an initial meeting with Caledon Community Services, John and I had a sense of what produce is needed to provide nutritious and healthy food for all people, particularly the most vulnerable of our community. No sooner had we finished our meeting with the leadership of the Exchange than John was right at work building the initial beds of our community garden. This was an extraordinary undertaking and to be honest, while I was hopeful and excited, I was uncertain of how it would all unfold.

Well our community garden ministry went well beyond my expectations. Many of you responded to John's call for support and donated dozens of plants and seeds as well as countless hours of planting, weeding, and harvesting. It was a delight to see the many pictures Carole Whitehead sent to us of her dropping off produce to the exchange, and she was one of many who were helping with this ministry. Despite the challenges of a pandemic, we were able to donate over a thousand pounds of fresh produce to our friends at the Exchange.

What began as a small project in 2020 will grow even larger this year. Together with Heather Somers, our resident horticulturalist, John will be inviting us all to help support our community garden ministry with time and financial support. While we've already received a \$1,000 grant from the York-Credit Valley Office of the Diocese of Toronto for the garden, we hope you will support this important ministry. Our plan is to double the size of the garden and further our support for our friends at the Exchange. Stay tuned to our weekly newsletters for more information and to learn about our upcoming Sunday Liturgies in the Garden starting in May; once a month we will invite you to join us for the celebration of the Eucharist in the garden. As Jesus provides a table of plenty for us, so shall we provide a table of abundance for others.

The Spirit continued to raise-up new ministers last January and I was delighted by Karen Code's eager embrace of parish life ministry. After many years of generous leadership, Wilma and James Clarke handed on the ministry to Karen and she got right to work organising our Shrove Tuesday supper. Many of you eagerly signed-up to help out that night, either by inviting neighbours, friends, and family and/ or cooking and serving the meal. I was deeply moved by all of you as you really gave it your all. Your time and energy proved fruitful: we had one of the largest Shrove Tuesday dinners in years. Not only was it one of the largest, it was a truly fun night. We welcomed new friends from around the community to the table and shared with them good food and great music. I'm particularly grateful to Bruno for bringing his band out that night and for providing some fine music which got people off their feet and dancing.

Few of us knew that night that would be our last celebratory gathering before a very long Lent would befall us. Although there was talk of a potential pandemic, we began our Lenten journey with some beautiful liturgies. I recall celebrating them and having a lingering sense in my mind that our Lenten journey would be like no other. Despite my fears and initial reluctance, I went off for my winter holiday as the Covid-19 virus began to spread rapidly across the globe. Early in the morning of March 14th I returned to Toronto, opened my phone and read a letter from our diocesan bishop, Bishop Andrew Asbil, announcing the suspension of public worship. I can still sense the pain I felt as I sat on the plane and the fear I had for our community.

Yet I was reminded the next day that God's ways are not our ways and sometimes we have to turn to God and let God lead us. As quick as my fears came they left as I received call after call, note after note, from you — the members of this community of faith — asking how you can help out. In a matter of days we had several of you calling parishioners on a weekly basis to see how people were doing and many of delivery groceries and supplies

to those unable to get them. Once again, you responded with an extraordinary generosity and became Christ to others in one of the greatest times of need.

We soon had to figure out how to worship together in light of public health guidelines. While I've never been one for the camera and dread having my picture taken, I opened my laptop and began live-streaming Sunday and daily worship. I wasn't sure who would "show-up" at first. Yet as I began our Facebook live-stream, I saw your names appear on my screen and felt God keeping us as one, even if it was just in spirit. Soon, I saw names of persons I've never heard of before and watched the numbers of those participating in our prayers increase over the course of the day.

The words of St. Paul's Letter to the Romans came to my mind in the early days of the pandemic: "And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God's love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God's love. No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 8:31-39) They remained with me throughout these past weeks and months. I recalled, too, that every time the Church was confronted by a major crisis, whether natural or human, God raised new saints to serve the People of God. Indeed, God was doing a new thing in our midst and raising new saints from among us. (Isaiah 43:19)

Although the pandemic may seem like a very long Lent for us, it has also given rise to new ministries and renewed our commitment to remain ever steadfast in faith and hope. As St. Paul says in Romans, "If God is for us, who can be against us?" Rather than halt our ministries, we've seen an increase in ministry. I once remarked to a priest friend of mine that I am more active in ministry today than I have ever been. And so have you.

Within a very short time we saw the emergence of new ministries. Those of you who began the phone tree list began discernment of ministry as lay pastoral visitors. Our garden ministry flourished. Rather than disbanding, our book club started to meet online. Our embrace of new technologies not only allowed us to broadcast worship daily, but also to engage more people in our Christian education. A number of us met in the spring on a weekly basis and explored the weekly lessons and participated in a series on the Gospel of Matthew, whereby we learned more about Matthew and the themes of his gospel. Wilma Clarke later led us in a three-part series on prayer.

In addition to online prayer and study, our embrace of new technologies enabled me to even hold pastoral counselling and spiritual direction sessions by way of Zoom. Although imperfect, the virtual meetings did permit for deeper engagement than phone calls sometimes do.

I am grateful to all of you who supported our embrace and integration of online worship in our community's prayer life. The wardens and I particularly appreciate the contributions that many of you gave to the purchasing and installation of a permanent live-stream system for Sunday and festal liturgies. Your support enables us to not only reach those unable to

share in our worship, but also provides an opportunity to reach new people. I continue to be amazed by the number of people who pray with us daily as well as Sunday. Who would've imagined the Daily Office would become an essential part of daily life for many people?

Finally, technology also enabled us to host our annual Christmas Bazaar online. Once again, your creativity and ingenuity enabled us to have a spectacular bazaar. In addition to the tasty treats you made and the hand-crafted gifts you donated, we also hosted a very successful raffle for some colourful and beautiful Christmas baskets thankfully given by several of you as well as two community businesses, Verona Teskey's Coldwell Banker Real Estate and our friends at Cappuccino Bakery and Cafe. All together, our Christmas Bazaar was able to raise well over \$2,800 in support of our ministries. Were it not for the technology that we have, we wouldn't have likely been able to have a bazaar this year.

If all these activities were not enough, we finally accomplished the long-awaited repair of our bell tower. Once again, your financial support of this endeavour helped us realise our dreams of one day ringing our bell. I would be remiss not to mention the generosity of Mildred Norris. To our surprise last year, we learned Mildred Norris gave a considerable donation to our Heritage Fund. Her donation greatly helped us to achieve our dream of restoring the tower, and for that I am grateful. Yet every donation, no matter how large or small, was essential in helping us restore the tower.

The day I first rang the bell, I thought it was deeply symbolic of the direction of our parish's ministry. We are to be a disciples of Jesus Christ who proclaim, through word and deed, the good news of our redemption in Christ. By virtue of our baptism, we exist not for ourselves but for the world. The simple ringing of the bell served as a sacramental, a symbol of our voices resounding through the community of Bolton and the world beyond.

And our voices are being heard and our ministry is catching the notice of others. More people are coming through our doors and seeking to learn more about Jesus and the good news he proclaimed. Although a small beginning, our community garden provided healthy and nutritious food to those who struggle to afford the essentials of life. And we celebrated the working of God in the lives of women and men who celebrated Baptism, Confirmation, and Holy Matrimony.

While I very much wish I could share with you the many more ways you have embraced and lived your baptismal vocation this year, and to thank by name every person who has given and shared in our ministry, space doesn't permit me to do so. Yet I close this report by sharing with you a highlight of ministry this year, just days before Christmas. In response to their confirmation in the faith, Nicholas D'Alfonso and Duncan Harding initiated our Christmas connection with our friends at All Saints Church and Community Centre in Toronto. Their idea was to go to the place of most need and to build a relationship with God's beloved poor. After we learned that the Centre needed hats, mitts and other essential items, Nick, Duncan, their friend Dewald and Duncan's mom, Louise, and I traveled to Toronto with a very large delivery of items that you generously gave and to serve a Christmas lunch. Nick, Duncan, Dewald, and Louise reminded me of the very

fundamental message of the Gospel, namely, to be instruments of God's healing and peace to the most wounded and vulnerable of our society.

Their ministry that day challenged me to live my faith more fully. Although I serve as a priest, I too am always in need of conversion and forgiveness, and life in a community — such as our parish community — is a place where I too walk and grow with you in faith and service. I am grateful to share in this ministry with you and pray daily for you and your loved ones. God is indeed up to a new thing and I know you and I are called to share in the new life that God offers to us in Jesus Christ. Let us hold each other in prayer, respond to Jesus' invitation to follow him and love others as he loved us.

As always, I remain your faithful servant in Christ,

Don Beyers+
Rector and Incumbent