

Glory to God whose power, working in us, can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine.
Glory to God from generation to generation, in the Church and in Christ Jesus, for ever and ever.
BAS Prayer after Communion p. 214

It has been stated many times that Rita is here to help St. Anne's prepare for next year when we will begin the search for our next rector. With help from Rita and other diocesan resource people, we continue to ask God to work in and through us as we look at our parish life today and what it might become in the future. Each one of us is a very necessary part of the puzzle that we call St. Anne's. Each part is different and contributes to forming a more complete picture of the Christ-centered community that we aspire to be not only for ourselves, but for our families, friends and neighbours.

Our transition journey so far has included a February workshop on Sharing Faith, a Parish Celebration in March, a closer look at what we expect from our rector and an enlightening look at some of our parish statistics. Here is a bit of what we covered...

It was a scary start for some in February when Rev. Bill Harrison lead our workshop on Sharing Faith. We tackled the ideas of Evangelism, Discipling, Outreach and Fundraising. What are they and what do they look like at St. Anne's? There was much relief when we realized that **evangelism** didn't mean going door-to-door or standing on the street corner trying to convince others about God. We simply need to be ourselves and tell others about our experience of the ways God touches our lives. Whenever we do something as a parish we can ask, "How are we going to share the good news of God's healing love as part of this activity?" **Discipling** is what we do when we help people grow as followers of Jesus, learning the stories of our faith, learning to pray, sharing our faith journeys with one another and seeing how faith relates to all areas of our life. We grow as disciples when we ask ourselves, regularly, "What does the Christian tradition have to say about this?" **Outreach** is what we do when we work toward social or environmental justice, or when we offer something to someone in need with no expectation of return. We keep in mind the question: "How are we helping to heal God's world?" And **fundraising** is a means to an end – and that end is sharing in God's great adventure of healing the world and inviting others on that journey of healing.

In March at our Parish Celebration we had a chance to tell each other about the blessings we have experienced at St. Anne's. With help from two Diocesan congregational coaches, we confirmed how much we value our history and how our clergy and hardworking, resourceful faith-based people have built and continue to build our parish community. We also agreed our parish is challenged by building maintenance and our need to share our faith more openly and reach already busy families. Above all, we must discourage the mindset of, "That's the way we've always done it." Out of these discussions we were lead most importantly to think about the questions of "Who is the God we have discovered in these blessings and challenges? What do we learn about God from these blessings and challenges?" Among other answers, we heard that God is "forgiving, compassionate and empowers us to grow in faith and understanding" and that He "uses family and community to bring us into a relationship with Him." And so, we know the things that actually work well yet need to look to the future with confidence to bring the best of our past into the future.

Our April parish conversation was all about the rector. Armed with a questionnaire and a handout on five types of rectors, we talked about our own preferences among the types, choosing

from among: Priest; Pastor; Teacher; Administrator; and Exhorter. What type of rector would meet your expectations? Key to a best fit for St. Anne's would be us having a clearer sense of our mission and also how our congregation could best help a rector with those tasks or ministries that we need. While there were people who chose each of the five types as their preference, it is important to know the reality that no one rector can be "everything to everyone". We may have previously relied on having a traditional priest and pastor, but our future rector will likely need other skills.

Our most recent parish conversation in June examined parish and community data that could drive our future decisions. Looking at where our parishioners live, we can say that St. Anne's is really a "village church" which feels connected to Byron. The value of being small is that we know each other well, are willing to adapt and love and have the ability to make special accommodations. Newcomers may find it difficult or feel out of place with our small church size. Have you ever tried to fit into an established small group? It's not easy to do without effort on the part of existing group members to welcome visitors.

We next heard some parish statistics that shed light on our current demographics, local population estimates and on our parish finances. Based on the surveys that asked parishioners about their volunteer experiences, over 80% of our parish is over the age of 50 and seems to be 2/3 female and 1/3 male. People who answered the survey are generally less active today than in the past and appear to be less willing in the future. Exactly why was not determined, yet many factors could be in play such as our lack of certainty about our future activities or even the aging of our population. Over the years 1998 to 2015, there was a correlation between our recorded attendance and identifiable givers. In 2015 attendance was approximately 120 with 150 givers. Those aged over 70 years also gave over 50% of all regular donations.

We heard in February that at least 30,000 people are needed to provide enough parishioners to support one Anglican Church (building and full-time rector). As of the 2011 federal census, the four closest census areas to the church of Byron, River Bend, Talbot and Woodhull had a total population of 20,100. That population is anticipated to grow by approximately 6,000 people in the next few years. With four other Anglican churches close by, this fact needs real consideration in developing our future plans on how to appeal to and welcome those seeking a Christian faith.

Finally in this session we considered our parish finances. Examining six sources of revenue and our expenses from 2012 to 2015, we saw that our financial picture is positive with improved control over expenses over these years. Our largest expense category is salaries. Asking people to consider "What does this financial information make you think about?", a number of questions arose as well as suggestions. Comments included that we should consider clergy that are less than full time considering our population and that if we value the level of ministry that we have had, we need to *commit* to cover the costs.

After all these conversations and contributions by so many parishioners, what is next?

We all need to keep these ideas in our minds and conversations with others to continue to build on our sense of where God is calling us. How do we keep the faith in our growing corner of the world? Good question! What do you think?