

Annual Meeting Sunday

Rector's Reflection on the year 2009-10

Ecclesia semper reformanda

This is what Martin Luther brought as profound insight into the life of the Church at the time of the reformation. It expresses the view that the Church always has to keep reforming herself or as we might say re-forming herself. I want to use that expression and its interpretation as the overarching theme for my report and this past year and as we move forward.

Firstly some broad brush strokes about what we have done this past year.

1. Your vestry elected unanimously your rector and we had a big celebration of that and our 150 years marked in a whole host of ways
2. We had to carry on re – forming after the loss of some members while still remaining open to welcome all back. We had to re-form vestry and the congregation and the way we did things
3. We have gained a significant number of new parishioners, thirty-three in fact.
4. We have faced financial realities globally as well as internally exercising firm clergy and vestry management to aim for as balanced a budget as we could get with the sole purpose of targeting finance to mission
5. We have restructured vestry and staffing internally to extend what we could do and to work at communication and openness. The new Agape committee structure is a sign of that continuing re-formation as we organize around the themes of parish, community and global outreach
6. We have been experimenting with service times, education opportunities, programs, trying both traditional things and new ways to find out what works and does not work in being the Church here in our own time and for the future for both leaders and congregation members
7. We have begun a healing process – begun after being torn by a deep seated conflict the previous year (but with roots in the wider history of the parish over a number of years) over sexuality/gender, racism, change and the locus of power.
8. We have had to re-learn to socialize and be together in a re-formed church finding it's way for now and the future – so attendance at social events over Advent and Lent was not insignificant as part of that nor gatherings like that at the rectory the other week with a combination of more recent members and others

9. We have carried on doing the things that we have always done too – offered thoughtful preaching, visiting preachers and teachers from near and far in the context of dignified leading of liturgy and music and studied the Bible and aspects of faith/social issues together
10. The day to day pastoral work of visiting the shut in's, baptisms, weddings, funerals, confirmation prep, laying on of hands and anointing, the sacrament of reconciliation, much one on one pastoral care, praying over the phone and social outreach has just continued and developed as we have re-formed and re configured

So a re-formation has happened and will continue to do so as we seek to hear the voice of God to “Build my Church” that came to St Francis and surely comes to us all. We always need to ask ourselves what am I doing as a Christian to build God's Church for now and the future. It must be a constant inspiration that theme as we re-form and be at the forefront of all our minds.

Secondly I want to talk about ‘challenges from the ramparts’

Like the prophets of old I have always felt my job was to walk around the ramparts and see what as a leader I think needs to be done for the present and future health of the parish. I take this role very seriously. As we continue re- forming to be what God wants us to be for now and the future I believe we have some key challenges and aims that are very achievable.

- a. Income needs to go up and we need to develop our financial capacity. You will hear more about this in due course but we need to shatter the myth that we are sitting on a fortune and do not need to improve our giving overall. If St John's is to grow in its mission for God to sustain what we do and to expand what we can do we have to. From increases in general giving to a structured and intentional deferred giving campaign and anywhere in between our financial goal must be balanced budget and not using Endowment for operating costs.
- b. We need to be more confident about the truth that God has gifted the parish with laity who have ministries. I celebrate all the ones that are visible. However I think that the only future is for a parish that says it loves groups and study groups it must provide opportunities in consultation with the clergy to have lay facilitated groups. There is an over reliance on the clergy for this. At present there are two of us but there needs to be a greater willingness to take responsibility for a more collaborative educational programming with clergy support and training both internally and externally. Similarly if people want daily worship there has to be attendance at such. Your clergy love daily services but we have had to be flexible to allow for people away in Florida, dying or moving away. There will be continuing opportunities for parishioners to show they love these opportunities including a summer Bible School for the first time. Please take them up.

- c. There is need to socialize more as when we do, we have fun. The parish needs more opportunities again that are lay inspired and led and these need to not be disconnected from the worshipping life of the Church or her education work. The attendance on weekdays at Evening Prayer and a shared food event have been amazing and worth bearing in mind for the future. It seems to me that we still think of worship and social as unrelated but they need to be seen together and part of the whole of building up a community.
- d. Sunday School and Youth work needs the effort and commitment of every parishioner as does the encouragement of even more members. There is a long history to these in the parish. There is a reality that is rarely talked about. Attendance for many years has been poor at Sunday School and youth work (with an occasional blip) and that hasn't been due to poor programs or unwilling teachers. At heart the problem is one of parental commitment to the Church and regular education. Priorities are placed elsewhere by so many and commitment too. That is a parental choice and we need to get that message across. Re-form of our education work is always something we review but the example of parents coming regularly to worship and bringing their children or encouraging their young people to be acolytes, worshippers, sharers in parish social life is the job of parents first and the congregation including clergy. We need to make our Sunday worship more inclusive of young people as it still seems tipped in favor of any age but youth. That is a delicate balance but we want to work on that.

For the next year:

For your clergy our priorities are to work at the rampart stuff and message in collaboration with others. I think you know we are hard workers and totally committed to building a St John's that is relevant for now and the future as is your Vestry in all the departments and area of parish life they work so hard at. Our priorities for the next cycle therefore include:

Encouraging the congregation to work at new members and welcome

Encourage the mobilization of the laity for mission

Encouraging the further integration of St John's in the wider community sharing by word and deed that St John's is a great spiritual home of pilgrim travelers and open to all

Encourage improved financial giving

We may need to appoint a Development officer (volunteer or paid) to target improving our financial capacity as well as a lay and qualified Youth Director as part of our moving on and expanding what we can do and it's effectiveness and your vestry will be exploring these options as will your clergy

In conclusion I wish to express my deepest thanks to you all and to mention my colleague Michael for his wonderful hard work and support this past year and always and my Wardens and Treasurer for their unflinching support and hard work and for all the Vestry members for theirs, and more to be said about Danny in due course too. I wish to thank all those who have shared committee leading, supporting the life

of the parish in so many ways and of course my staff and your staff for their excellence and for everyone being partners in building up this great parish for an even more exciting role in the future.

St John's in the Diocese is known as a "cardinal parish", a key parish for its journey and work and this is what has been achieved to date. I believe we can do even better and even more if we respond in faith, with hope and courage and with a sole desire to as our Gospel said to love each other and treat each other as if we did always. Change and re-form is a sign of an alive Church around traditions tried and tested.

Let's look ahead. We are marching to Zion, the Church God wants us to be and we can do this together if we remember that goal. Let's love one another and care for one another on this re-formation path and then we shall let the world see that the reformation not only happened in the 16th century but happened and happens at Lattintown all the time. Ecclesia semper reformanda. Thank you Father Luther. Thanks be to God for his inspiration. Thank you all.

Maybe a good quote to chew on is " we do desperately need to find new ways of being and doing church, ways that are less about church as an institution existing for its own sake and more about church as community, relationship, spiritual practice and service. This may entail less emphasis on our quest and more on God's quest for us."

By Anthony B. Robinson