



February 20, 2013

Pastoral Letter

To the Parishes of the City of Peterborough

“Cast all your anxiety on God, because he cares for you.”

I Peter 5:7

As members of the church we live in anxious times. Whether we look at the economy, the environment, world politics or our own lives, families and church we see and hear reasons to be anxious. Uncertainty about the future breeds fear that invites us to act in ways that only increase the anxiety and it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. We become the future we fear.

Scriptures reminds us that, for the Christian community, there is nothing stronger than God’s deep love for us. Despite all that we see and hear around us we are not abandoned even if and when changes happen in our lives and our Church. Change is inevitable. We show what we ultimately believe in how we respond to change. We can be a witness to grace and courage in facing difficult times.

Why am I writing this to you at this time? It is no secret that our churches – not just in Peterborough but across the diocese – are facing anxious times. Declining attendance; financial stresses and aging congregations confront us with significant challenges. In order to think creatively and proactively about the challenges in Peterborough I have been meeting with clergy and lay representatives of the city parishes since last June. We have been honest and frank with each other about our situations. We all have older buildings that require ongoing repairs and we are all facing financial challenges of varying degrees of severity. However, we also all have a deep commitment to God and to the call of God to be part of the Christian witness to God’s love in this city. Our challenge is not first about money or buildings – our challenge is how we continue to be that witness to Christ in ways that are sustainable best using the resources we do have.

There have been rumours that there is a plan to close parishes. There is no plan to do that. My first priority is to work with all the parishes of Peterborough to encourage and support ways to be sustainable in the midst of the current social and financial challenges. If a parish cannot sustain its financial responsibilities then a long process of discussion and conversation with the Area Bishop, Director of Stewardship Development, Wardens and people takes place seeking alternative solutions. Sometimes the congregation simply does not have the capacity to continue to sustain its mission, building and clergy costs. Then they enter a process of choosing next steps – amalgamating with another congregation or closing directly. It is a long process of discernment. I am grateful to St. Alban’s for the way in which they have worked with their incumbent and me over the past few years in that process and the care they have taken in discerning their next step. They have chosen to



amalgamate with All Saints' and take with them their gifts and skills. Ministry has not ended – just found a new way to continue.

The future of any parish lies with the vision and commitment of its congregation – the people of God. When we are clear about who we are and what God has called us to do and be then we ask what do we need to fulfill our call. We have the gift of many people – lay and clergy - in all our parishes with gifts, skills and passion for ministry. We have physical resources in our buildings and lands. We have financial resources entrusted to us for the purposes of ministry. In our Peterborough meetings we are putting all on the table to ask ourselves and to ask God how we will best use them in mission. We do not yet know where God is leading us but we do know that we need each other in this process!!

I ask for your prayers for the ongoing conversations and the ideas that are emerging. City clergy have been gathering weekly for prayer and bible study to hear God more clearly. Parishes are sharing ministry in new ways – shared participation in Lenten studies; invitations to parish learning opportunities. Watch for a proposed opportunity to get together for some fun!! Anglicans are not all work and no play!

We are stronger together than we are apart. Working, praying, learning and worshipping together is a sign of strength – not of weakness. Maybe God will surprise us with new possibilities as we learn from each other.

Pray for your own parish – pray daily for all the parishes of Peterborough – and pray that God will show you where and how to share with us in this adventure of faith in the face of uncertain times.

Yours in Christ,

The Rt. Rev. Linda Nicholls
Area Bishop of Trent-Durham
& Suffragan Bishop, Anglican Diocese of Toronto