



RECTOR'S REPORT



RECTOR'S ANNUAL PARISH VESTRY REPORT 2023

“From the wilderness..., the whole congregation of the Israelites journeyed by stages, as the Lord commanded them” Exodus 17:1

Dear Parishioners,

I greet you all in the wonderful name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. The above-mentioned verse comes from our Old Testament reading today. This year, our Annual Parish Vestry Meeting takes place on the 3rd Sunday in Lent. This takes place, beginning with the Service of Holy Eucharist with the business of Vestry following immediately afterwards.

Lent reminds us that the holy work we are all about as a parish, is a journey. It is a journey of faith, experiencing real ups and downs, challenges and celebrations, as well as grief and joys. For us as people of faith, it is a journey that passes by the way of the cross and yet it is a journey whose final goal is not set by us, but by God, and that goal is resurrection...it is new life.

Our journey together as a parish for the past year, presented us with many challenges and opportunities. The challenges were of gradually moving out of the Covid-19 pandemic in the middle of last year with its impact on parish life, and the opportunities before us were to engage in conversations of moving forward, resetting ourselves and daring to do things differently.

Our life together as a parish is not an isolated one. We are an integral part of a much bigger social context, surrounded by diverse communities, a country that faces many socio-economic and political challenges, and a global community with its own challenges and opportunities. We also belong to a diocese, which also belongs to much larger faith community. All of this does have an impact on our life together in the parish at every level. Our journey together is therefore is not an isolated one. Always being conscious of this reality, we have to consistently ask ourselves, *what is God saying to us within the realities of this day, at this time?*

Or, *how can we be God's church in the unique context in which we find ourselves?*

In asking these questions, it means we have to listen well, listening to God, listening to others, and importantly listening to ourselves. As people of faith, we do know that God is fully present and active in life no matter in what circumstances we find ourselves.

God is always on the move, renewing, recreating, rebuilding amongst us. Our deep listening enables us to participate with God in God's mission in our context and in this world. We do this through our worship, our prayers and engaging in and supporting all activities in our parish through our time, talents and treasure (financial stewardship).

In Vestry today, I do encourage you to listen attentively to the churchwarden's written report, as it gives us a window of our collective ministry journey together, as well as the report of our financial stewardship for the past year.

As your parish priest and rector of the parish I shall now share with you a few thoughts and reflections as we continue our journey together. I share this with you in great humility, to facilitate more conversation, to envision the future, and also in confidence that God will take what each one of us brings to parish life, to form and shape us for His glory and purpose.

I share with you and start from the premise that God is at work amongst us and will continue to do so.

How do we continue participating with God as we collectively journey together as a parish? Not underestimating the reality of the Covid-19 pandemic, and its impact on our parish life together, how do we move forward pastorally, compassionately and be the parish God called us to in our present context?

We begin to reflect on these questions and many more, recognizing that everything around us has changed, especially during the past year – we have changed too. We know that nothing is guaranteed and that life could shift again and at great speed.

The social context in which we are called to live out our faith is changing all the time. Our inner resources of coping with what is happening in us, with us and around us, needs constant personal reflection and personal adaptation. We seemed to be on a constant roller coaster ride of grief and loss.

Those who are setting time aside to help us understand the context in which we live our faith, are saying that we find ourselves in a liminal space, the in-between of the known and the unknown, the already and the not yet. I even read in an article the other day that *“gone are the days of being complacent both in life and on one's faith journey.”*

Adapt or die, seems to be the common phrase when living in such an uncertain, constantly evolving environment. In my own view, for us as people of faith, this seems and should not be anything new. With God, who is constantly renewing, rebuilding and recreating and us participating with God, our faith resources help us to be what God wants us to be now in this context.

In Lent, this year, rediscovering, and looking at Morning and Evening Prayer through a fresh lens, we rediscover what it has to do with daily life, and in so doing, it informs our collective faith journey.

When it comes to parish life, our ministry together and the way forward, I hold before us three practices for our collective discernment.

Discerning our strengths as a Parish:

Here, I want to mention the parable of a dog. Have you ever seen a really active dog who's been held back and leashed for too long? When they are finally set free to run, they charge ahead at full speed.

Well, after quite a long experience with the Covid-19 pandemic, we might be tempted to act like a dog who has been leashed for a long time. The temptation might be there to get back to how it was before, and release our passion and act on behalf of God and on behalf of the world.

In fact, there is nothing wrong in doing so. The danger, is however, that in moving forward in our own strength, we become blind to how God is moving, and deaf to what the Spirit is saying to us.

This year, the parish is reminded that it is part of a faith history of 110 years. We are in the process of planning events in our parish to celebrate this achievement. We must also draw from the wells of those who left us this history, bring it into the present, and looking forward, ask what God is up to for the next 110 years, and join the journey.

Many call this process a form of strategic planning.

Financial Stewardship is also a pertinent and vital aspect of our planning forward.

The continual conversations we are already having, remain important.

Again, I hold this before us, for our leadership and for our journey together. We must discern prayerfully together.

Discerning ahead and not going back to 'Normal':

The beautiful journey of coming together and discerning ahead, can lead us, not only into something new, but can also lead back to that same place where we were before the pandemic.

Liminal spaces, we are told, can be precarious. They have the potential to change and transform, but transformation is not a guarantee, it is a choice. Many still feel that the pandemic has taken a lot away from them, and it is much easier to go back to what was normal and cling to what was familiar.

To return to the normal I believe is to miss God's invitation for newness and renewal. We need to be willing to wrestle with new ideas and insights alongside others, especially those whom we find difficult to enter into conversation with.

As leadership we need to keep ourselves accountable, holding the voices and gifts of our fellow parishioners in grace and love. When we do this, new energy will be released, new life will be born. It will also keep us humble and postured with a mindset of being willing to go wherever God may lead us.

Again, I hold this practice before us.

Discerning to go forth in Community:

The parish of St Oswald's is a very vibrant parish in all its diversity. We need to discover more and more ways in which our diversity can be realized. This can be effectively done through more and more participation from all parishioners. We must all take responsibility for building our parish through our encouragement, support of one another.

There is a big need for community involvement and coming alongside community organizations in outreach activities. We do not need to be going it alone and re-inventing the wheel. There are already good outreach initiatives taking place, we must join in. Again, I hold this practice before us.

I have no doubt that these three points above will enable us to plan together, move forward, and extend God's Kingdom where we find ourselves.

Words of Gratitude, Appreciation

To all parishioners, I do express my deep gratitude and appreciation for your love and support as I minister amongst you. In saying this, I also express the same from Beverley, Jesse, Joshua and Joel. In the past vestry reports when referring to our three sons, I used to say the boys. Now, they are three young men, Jesse has recently started permanent employment, Joshua is doing post graduate studies, and Joel is in his second year of university study. Where did the time go? I recall, when I became rector of St Oswald's Joel was in grade 6 at primary school. As a family we want to say to you that we are happy to be here.

It is also my intention to apply for Sabbatical Leave later this year. I have already informed parish leadership at our last parish council meeting last year in December.

Thank you, churchwardens, chapelwardens and all councillors. It is such a joy to do ministry together with you. Your gifts of administration and supporting me in the ministry of pastoral oversight is invaluable. Those who are part of the parish executive, you know who you are – you are a blessing indeed.

To you, the parish staff, thank you. Our parish office administrator, for ensuring all parish admin is in good order. We appreciate your innovation and you often going beyond your daily tasks. You are an asset to the parish.

Thank you, clergy, for assisting in the parish. Your support is invaluable to me in many ways, and sharing your charisma in the parish is really enriching our common life together. I acknowledge your families for allowing you to share with me in the priestly ministry here.

Thank you, lay ministers and reader's guild and sacristans. Your commitment to assist in the sanctuary and community is appreciated. I pray that you will continue to find it a great joy to serve God's people. Your involvement in the various parish ministries is not unnoticed.

To you the choir, led by our committed parish organist, your ministry is valued during our worship services. May you grow from strength to strength especially in your ministry in the diocese and beyond.

To you, the welcoming team. You are the first parishioners to be noticed when they come for worship. I pray that you will continue grow in your special ministry.

To all other parish ministries, those who lead and those who participate, I pray that your ministries will also grow and you will find it spiritually fulfilling.

Lastly and most importantly, to all other parishioners.

Once again, thank you for your amazing support you are giving to your parish church. Without you, we will not be a parish. Your ongoing prayers, love and care for me and your fellow parishioners, make it a joy to serve you.

Thank you for your ongoing financial commitment to the parish. Although we are faced with many financial challenges, we are still able to make our monthly contributions to the Diocese with a little bit of extra to support parishes who are not able to. Thank you for this. With the amazing ability of the churchwardens to manage parish finances, supported by the rest of parish council, we can only grow from strength to strength. Be assured of my ongoing pastoral and sacramental ministry amongst you.

I encourage you to keep yourselves updated with parish news, regularly browsing the parish website, reading the parish quarterly magazine, Conversations, and also, please ensure you do receive a monthly and weekly pew leaflet. Communication will be vital to ensure we remain a happy parish family.

Those amongst us who have lost loved ones over the past year, remain forever in our prayers and thoughts. God bless you all!

Parish Services, Office Hours, Baptisms, Weddings, Funerals, Pastoral Visitations and all other parish activities and events will still be held with great dignity and the respect that it deserves.

Our Parish Forward Planning, is of high importance and will require your full participation. As we proceed this year, God remains with us, as God has been with those before us. I thank you all, as we journey together.

Rev Selwyn Engelbrecht

Dated: March 2023
