



RECTOR'S REPORT



RECTOR'S ANNUAL PARISH VESTRY REPORT 2025

Sunday 09 March 2025

Let us pray...

***Go before us, Lord in all our doings
With your most gracious favour
And encourage us with your continual help
That in all our works
Begun, continued, and ended in you
We may glorify your holy Name
And finally, by your mercy
Obtain the fullness of eternal life;
Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen***

Sisters and Brothers, today we all gather for Worship on this, the First Sunday in Lent 2025. We also gather for our Annual Vestry Meeting immediately after the Service. While praying through and reflecting on the lectionary readings before us, I felt a deep sense of God's sustaining love, care and protection for us as we respond to God's call on our lives, and as we continue God's work wherever we are. Each of the lectionary readings holds before us, a picture or vision to keep on growing into our call or vocation as God's people, and to faithfully share in ministry and mission with God.

From the first reading in Deuteronomy chapter 26:1-11, we read about the expectations to sustain the covenant relationship between God and people. God's people are reminded to always give thanks in recognition of God's love, care, provision and liberation both in the past and present. Psalm 91, of which we only read a few verses, is a Psalm celebrating God's care and protection of those who dwell in God, and make God's presence a refuge. The reading from Romans 10:8b-13 is a message of faith in Christ that ensures that all in Christ will not be disgraced, because all who call on God's name are saved. In the reading from the gospel, Luke 4:1-13, we read the familiar story of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness. Jesus is challenged to turn stones into bread, to jump from the top of the temple and to gain all the world's wealth and glory by bowing to the devil. Jesus resists, using God's word as his guide.

The insight into these readings, as we continue into our Lenten journey and gather for our annual parish vestry today, is that the focus, rather than being on Jesus's temptation, is on God's care, protection and provision for God's people. When the temptation story of Jesus is placed into that context, the focus shifts dramatically away from fear or failure or succumbing to evil, and onto God's resources, that are at our disposal to keep us strong and faithful. The invitation for all of us as we gather, is to recognize God's presence with us and on our journey together. The temptations Jesus was confronted with are no different than the ones we wrestle with in the world today – power and influence, wealth and consumption, personal appetites and personal gratification. We can also locate these in the spiritual and big social justice challenges of today. What is important for us, is to continue to focus on God's care and protection, or we can easily fall into the trap of fighting evil on our own human terms.

Jesus refused to do so. By trusting in God, and immersing himself in God's word, Jesus simply embraced a different set of values – self-giving, humility, servanthood, fasting and self-control.

Parish family, we are sharing and will continue sharing in God's ministry and mission where we are, and be guided by the values Jesus came to show us. Our parish ministry and mission will continue in the spirit of conversation, prayer and collaboration.

It is with sincere gratitude, appreciation and acknowledgement that we say thank you to Revd.'s Ernest, Tembeka, Thozamile and Mxolisi; your sacramental and pastoral ministry to the spiritual life of this parish is invaluable. God's richest blessing on you and your families as you continue to minister in the parish. To all the retired clergy, for your willingness to preside and preach from time to time, God bless you and your families.

My Sisters and Brothers, today we will also meet for our annual parish vestry, as I have mentioned earlier. This will be my 10th annual parish vestry together with you. I must say, it feels like yesterday, and I do trust you will say the same. We are still journeying together through God's grace, and for that, we say, "Thanks be to God."

Sharing the rector's annual parish vestry report with you today, there might be a sense that it sounds quite similar to that of the past 9 years. If I should mention everything of our ministry and mission journey together on a daily basis for the past year, we will indeed sit here for at least half a day.

However, I want to take you back to the first annual parish vestry we were together. At the conclusion of the rector's report, with reference to the way forward, I said that my time with you as rector, will be characterized and experienced as our shared call or vocation, to grow as individuals and as a parish in response to God's call in Christ, and that we will enjoy the journey together. This morning, I can say with a deep sense of conviction that all of this has held true. Therefore, I will let it suffice for these two things to continue to reverberate in and through our experiences together. When it comes to ministry and mission, you, the parishioners of St Oswald's, St Francis and St Luke's continue to offer and give of yourselves over and over again. Among you, are the committed few you have elected to share in leadership with me.

The Churchwardens, Andree, Nadine and alternate warden Loretta. It was such a joy and humble privilege to have come together, engaging in conversation on both personal and parish matters, and together with the rest of parish council doing the ministry we are called to do. Thank you for your deep insights and wisdom assisting me to give pastoral leadership. Parish Council, it was so satisfying for me, when we all experienced the deep sense that whatever the next step has to be, will be for the well-being of the parish and where God wants to lead us. This vestry acknowledges therefore all the ministry that was done over the past year through parish leadership, and this includes the remarkable faithfulness of committed chapelwardens and chapelry councilors.

August 2024 brought us to the end of the 110th Year Celebrations. For this we give thanks to God. We were fortunate to have had our diocesan Bishop, Raphael to officiate at the Service. The year of celebrations was marked with various parish activities and was a great success. We acknowledge again with gratitude the hard work and preparation done, especially the preparations behind the scenes. The monthly Collects, capturing a decade's ministry and mission, researched and written down by our Lay Ministers during the year of celebrations, was indeed a profound blessing to all as we prayed these Collects Sunday after Sunday. To many of us, especially to me your parish priest, it has given much deeper spiritual insight into the history of this parish, and into those who have labored day and night to reach where we are today. There was many a time that I felt I am just a small part of the St Oswald's unfolding story, and that I am indeed walking on holy ground. For me this was and still is particularly meaningful. I really want to encourage parishioners to continue spending time reading or praying these Collects. Well done Lay ministers!

From the churchwardens' report we will hear more about the Financial Stewardship of the parish. The auditor is satisfied with the high quality of bookkeeping and highly commends the churchwardens sharing in such an important ministry. This past year, amidst the many social challenges of parishioners facing unemployment and daily rising costs, we still managed to honour diocesan and parish assessments. Then there were the given daily and monthly expenditures to maintain and sustain the physical buildings of our parish. In our parish we have eight buildings to look after. The generosity of our parishioners, through donations, are all helping to cover the necessary costs. Thank you, parishioners, for your dedication and commitment to the parish church. The Organ Project remains a big challenge and yet, can be an exciting project. This project cannot solely rest in the hands of parish council. I suggest that a committed team be put in place to come up with a time line and continue with this project.

As much as the daily ministry and mission of the parish continues, there still remains the biggest challenge, encouraging parishioners to offer their time and talent. There are various legitimate reasons, of course. Many of our parishioners are spending more time at work simply to make ends meet, many are in responsible positions at work, and most families are supporting each other in the extra curricula activities of their children. These are all signs of the times we are living in. We also note that there are the faithful among us, who have come to the point now of stepping down from active ministry because of age. They know who they are, and we do give thanks to God for them.

I therefore ask that we should collectively own responsibility in encouraging new members (and especially those who are not sure), to be involved in ministry and mission. The life and ministry to which God is calling us, is a call upon our lives. Ministry involvement is the way we get to participate in God's work in the world. To all involved in current parish and chapelry ministries – from administration – to liturgy – to pastoral – to outreach, thank you for your ministry and for allowing God to use you in a special way.

Archbishop Thabo, at the opening service of our 110th Year Celebration, alluded to the great gift of diversity in this parish. This is a ministry that we must treasure and sustain among us. We will continue to extend Christ's hospitality to all who worship in this parish. We will proclaim the gospel through all we do, while compassionately looking at the world today. We will proclaim the good news and express our faith in commitment to God's will for a better world. Yes, there are the nuts and bolts to which we must attend every day. Thank God we have leadership and parishioners like you who are willing to work through these matters that ministry and mission bring. In and through it all, we remain aware of our calling. Whether we have been a parishioner for 70 years, 50 years, 20 years, 5 years, or 2 months. We are all in this together.

Lastly, thank you to all our parish staff, especially Deirdre our Office Administrator; you fulfill an important function in the life of the parish. We thank you.

Now, let us all step forward in offering ourselves to God's mission and ministry in this place, so that others will join us as we journey together with God.

Amen

Revd Selwyn Engelbrecht
Rector

Dated: March 2025
