

The Anglican Parish of St. Philip
20 Coady's Road
Portugal Cove-St. Philips, NL A1M 1L1

February 9th, 2014

Dear Parishioners,

“Where there is not vision, the people perish” Proverbs 29:18

As I prepare myself to write my report for our Annual Meeting, the above verse keeps coming to my mind; and I find myself wrestling over the value and very real necessity of vision in the life of a parish. And as I reflect upon it, I become more aware that without vision the likely consequences are indifference, stagnation and decline. I am also aware that where there is vision, even with the challenges that accompany it, there is hope, focus, renewal and vitality among the people.

Vision, then, is something which takes root and focus in the minds and hearts of the people; and the love, faith and hope of the people become the active ingredients which propel the vision towards its actualization. Also, people with vision are Mission minded and focused people who see potential and possibility. They are people like those whom Jesus talked about; who having put their hand to the plow do not look back but moves forward with focus and determination.

Last year, our Annual Meeting accepted and approved a Mission Statement for our Parish. It is printed on the first page of our Annual Reports. It is a vision of how we can grow our spirituality together, nurture our faith, and deepen our fellowship with each other and with our Lord. A Mission Statement like this, by its very nature, is continuous and long term.

Each Sunday we pray our Parish Collect asking God for help in the fulfilment of our Mission. When we are **personally committed** to the things for which we pray God will fulfill it in His people in our Parish.

There is another vision which I want to lay before you and to ask for full participation from all our members. This cannot work without the full support of everybody.

At our Vestry Meeting on January 21st, the members of your vestry took a leap of faith. The Vestry understands the weariness that has set in from years of heavy fund-raising to meet budgets, to make payments on our loans, and then to have a campaign to fully pay off our loans so that our new building could be consecrated. Your Vestry understands that with such priority having been given to fund-raising we are being drawn away from the many other ministries that are so vital and necessary to our journey in faith. Furthermore heavy fundraising shifts the parish financial burden to a small group of people who have to make sure the fundraising is successful. This is unfair and it is unsustainable over a long time.

The Vestry has decided that the time has come to change our present level of fundraising and trust in the people to provide for the Church's financial needs **through weekly envelope offerings**. This will be reflected in our Budget for 2014. I'm sure you agree that this is visionary as well as being a tremendous leap of faith. What this means, of course, is that fundraising will decrease while placing emphasis on weekly offerings; and in the next two to four years our plan and hope is that we will be able to support our financial needs through weekly envelope offerings. This process begins in 2014.

Of course this will not work as it should if it is no more that the vision of your rector and Select Vestry. **It must be the collective vision of all our members and every member is asked to fully participate in this right away.** I have already challenged the Vestry members about their own offerings because those who give leadership must, themselves, be committed to the vision they have given to the Parish membership.

I believe that fund-raising is a good parish ministry of service. Furthermore it brings people together and helps build fellowship and community. I hope it will continue but not in its present form. For, when we have to depend on it to survive then we know we have a spiritual problem and we know there is really only one solution; the love, good-will and faith of the people towards God's Church.

In your contribution statement for 2013, I wrote a letter encouraging everyone to give an extra dollar in your weekly envelope. However, with the decision reached by your vestry this will not be enough to help us to reach our financial goals.

I ask you to take a look at the Record of Offerings for our parish. I think you can see clearly that there is much room for all members to work at being more supportive of each other and more responsive to God in our offerings. It seems like these statistics suggest that for a lot of people there is a very real need to be more generous towards God's Church in response to how generous and gracious God is with all of us.

I am suggesting that \$500.00 is the minimum amount that anybody should give to their weekly offering envelope per year. I really do understand that this represents a big movement for some and may be a bit frightening to others; but it does not have to be done all at once and can be a goal to reach in the next few years. I assure you that I am very sensitive to people, as is your vestry. But things need to change, and this is a vision within our reach and I encourage and invite everyone to work towards our goal of managing our obligations through the peoples' offering and being much less dependent on fundraising. All of us are requested to do better with our weekly offerings and this is the year to begin

Please, **let's be positive about this**. For, there is nothing which gets in the way of ministry and progress as much as negative and unhelpful talk. Talk, yes; but talk positively and hopefully and in a way that encourages and challenges. This is the Christian way.

I want to make clear to all of you that the ACW and ACM will still continue with their projects of fundraising and as in the past to continue to support the ministry of the church. The vestry recently approved that there will be no table set up in the foyer to sell tickets on any events that these groups are planning. The vestry will continue with the Harvest activities. You will see that there are fundraising events for the vestry but it will be done differently this year which I will explain to you at this meeting.

With your Vestry, I strongly believe in the potential of this parish. You have demonstrated our parish potential over and over in the past six years. We have paid off a debt of \$447,000 over that short time. In 2013 you have contributed to the Maintenance Fund in such a way that would please any priest. So there is great potential in this parish. As your priest, I am very thankful to you for all that you have done. And I am confident in you, I believe in you, and I do trust that everybody will pull together and make this work.

Teresa of Avila, who loved the Lord Jesus, once said; "All our trouble comes from not watching Christ." When we take our eyes off Christ and his ways we lose focus and our vision becomes blurred. So let's stay focused on Christ and let him lead us onward to fulfill this parish vision. And, of course, we will need a good stewardship program which will include this financial vision as well as some aspects of our Mission Statement, of worship, prayer, service, and support of the Church's Ministry. I believe "Stewardship" is the key.

Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful (1 Cor. 4:2).

It is a very rich experience when people enter into a relationship with God through a pattern of Christian stewardship and of a deep and personal experience of giving because "**I want to give**"; experiencing stewardship as a love response to God. When we observe how Jesus spoke about stewardship we see clearly his emphasis on faithfulness. Jesus, himself, was faithful to His Father's will and

faithful in his mission. He has set the pattern of faithfulness for his church to follow. Jesus is spoken about as a faithful and high priest in the service of God, and Revelation speaks of Him as “the faithful witness.” Jesus prizes faithfulness in his disciples. Perhaps we can understand this a bit more deeply if we just pause and prayerfully ask; “What have I received?” Then, perhaps, we behold a bit more clearly why it is vitally important to Christians to be good stewards and to be faithful as God is faithful in Christ.

On behalf of Vestry, I commend this vision and leap of faith to all our members. I encourage the regular use of the weekly offering envelope, maintenance fund envelope and the use of the envelopes for the special appeals for the seasons in the life of our church. We give because God is a giver. We give with a free and generous heart; knowing what God in Christ has done for us. Our Lord has taught us to be good stewards; let us then follow his instruction.

In conclusion I wish to say once again how grateful I am to the people of the parish for all they do and also for their personal support. I really do thank you from the bottom of my heart.

I thank the wardens, vestry, Honorary Assistants, Deacon, ACW, ACM, Choir and Organists, Altar Guild, cleaning teams, readers, people involved in preparing “The Prayers of the People”, Adult Servers and Eucharistic Ministers, Sunday School leadership team, counters, sides persons, and if I have missed anyone I thank you, too, and I’m sorry for the oversight.

Today, Jesus still calls his people to active involvement in His Ministry. This Annual Meeting provides another opportunity to all of us to hear his call and commit to being involved in the many aspects of ministry in our parish.

The tide is coming in and changes are occurring.....God is in control, not us.

Faithfully yours,

The Rev. Ed Keeping

Rector