

Let's begin with prayer. Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on your holy people gathered in this place. Open our ears to hear your Word spoken, and our minds to understand all you would have us be and do with your gifts of grace and understanding for all that You love. Amen

Please be seated.

Our Bishop, Bishop Anna Greenwood-Lee, joined us back on January 14th for our regular Sunday worship. With the help of our Bishop, there was opportunity for our congregation to move further along with the discernment process, a process we trust will lead us to finding our next incumbent here at the Anglican Parish of Salt Spring Island.

For those of us who were here to share with Bishop Anna, we had opportunity to share our thoughts about this journey of discovery on which we have embarked. You may recall the venn diagram which Bishop Anna drew on the flip chart. It was a diagram of three intersecting circles. Within each of the three circles the Bishop wrote a single word. The three words were – heart, assets, and needs. And with each of these three words, we were invited to share our ideas. Ideas around:

- 1) who we are as a parish
- 2) what it is we are looking for in our journey of faith, and what we wish our next incumbent to be
- 3) what we can afford, and finally
- 4) what is God asking us to be.

Bishop Anna's venn diagram provided us with an opportunity to examine who we are and what things are important to us here at All Saints Ganges and St. Mary's at Fulford Harbour. The third circle in the venn diagram was labelled 'needs'. The contents of this circle are, as yet undiscovered, and which will be the basis for our continuing work in our discernment of what God is asking us to be.

I wish to take a few minutes here to review what we said regarding "who we are", by reviewing what Bishop Anna put down on the flip chart pages in response to what we said at that gathering. Under the heading of "Heart" we said this – we are a diverse worshipping community with a strong contemplative base. We can be playful, creative, and at peace. We want to be inclusive, and believe we are spiritual and not just religious. We continue to maintain a keen sense of wanting to learn about ourselves and our connection to our Creator. We have a great sense of humour. Is there any other way for us to be? We are a people who share love for our sisters and brothers within our worshipping community and in the wider community beyond our doors. We love music and dance, liturgical expression, nature, animals, people, the arts, and being able to reach out to the wider community through shared meals, events, and volunteer activities. We believe that we are a welcoming community just as Christ wishes us to be. And we want to be a refuge for those in-need, both within and beyond these church walls.

Another aspect of who we are can be found in the assets entrusted to this congregation. As a faith community, we are blessed with having multiple sites where our two functional worship centres are located, along with four cemeteries. We also have the old St. Mark's church site which has been deconsecrated as a worship site, but has yet to be sold. The fourth and final structure we have stewardship over is the Rectory located across the parking area here at All Saints Ganges. This site is currently leased to Social Services for use as an early childhood development centre.

With the exception of old St. Mark's, all our sites are being used by the wider community as part of our ministry within the wider and diverse community on this island.

Today, in digital format, our Annual Vestry Report is being made available to you. Shortly, hard copies of this same annual report will be available to anyone wishing the report as a paper document. Parish council wishes to draw your attention to the financial reports and the proposed 2024 parish budget contained as part of the Vestry Report, prepared by our wardens, parish council, and the parish treasurer. Parish council recommends this budget for approval by our congregation at this upcoming Vestry meeting.

Our operating budget for this year is at best to be considered 'thin'. Although we have abundant money set aside through bequests, which should permit us to complete several renovation and maintenance projects at several of our sites, our weekly givings and other income streams are looking hard-pressed to keep up with our expenses. The bottom line on the budget for 2024 is this – as we discern what we wish for our next incumbent and what we can afford to offer any perspective candidate, we need to discern what proportion of full-time equivalency for spiritual leadership, pastoral care, along with parish administration and the myriad of other responsibilities a new incumbent will be asked to take on. Can we handle this commitment and be fiscally responsible at the same time?.

Yet, our situation is not all gloom and despair. We have more assets to be thankful for. We have many retired clergy, several of whom are very active in the life of this parish and in the life of the wider community beyond our church. We also have four recently licensed lay ministers in our midst. We have the support of our diocesan Bishop who cares about this parish family and is eager to see this parish continue to be an "Anglican Presence" here on Salt Spring Island. Our congregation and our many community associates give generously of their time, talents and finances in the on-going work of our church. Some are involved in helping with funerals and memorial services. Others volunteer at the local food bank, drive people to appointments and to worship services on Sunday mornings. Still other give their time to programs provided by our outreach ministry with the 'Star-of-the-Sea' at St. Mary's Church in Fulford Harbour and many other community activities.

In the Fall of 2023, a stewardship campaign generated some new areas of support for the work we do. With the search for our next incumbent beginning in earnest, our budget requirements could change dramatically, requiring this parish family to revisit both the budget we will approve for 2024, and our commitment to the life of our parish family and this church. Remember this, God will never lay anything before us which we can not find a way through, or over, or under. That is the promise Jesus made to all who choose to follow after our Redeemer and King. We can find the way if we are open to the path before us.

So all of this brings us to the third circle in the Bishop's vene diagram, our "Needs".

And that raises several questions in my mind.

- 1) What are our needs here at the Parish of Salt Spring Island?
- 2) What are we looking for in our next incumbent?
- 3) What can we afford?

When Bishop Anna was with us on January 14th, we only briefly had time to begin to look at these questions. We immediately identified that we need a priest who is skilled in preaching, liturgical

expression, someone able to read the pulse of the congregation, someone able to “rally the troops” so to speak. Someone who can show us that it is from within ourselves that we can do great things, and that we can ensure that the infrastructure of our parish is intact and growing. Someone who is able scale all the needs of the parish and be able to see every need through to an endpoint no matter what the end result might be. Finally, we hope our new incumbent is skilled in leading our parish in the good use of our time, talents, and resources – both monetary and otherwise.

So, is that it? Have we exhausted the list of needs we have before us? Can you offer anymore suggestions. I will try to record them here and then post them with my sermon to our web page.

- 1) Be more inclusive of others
- 2) Return to the style of the old red prayerbook (BCP)
- 3) Renovate the existing rectory to attract clergy and use that residence to off-set what the incumbent is to be paid.

Thank you for your suggestions. Back in January, Bishop Anna pointed out that most parishes searching for their next incumbent are looking for the “perfect cleric”. Someone with boundless energy, someone who is always ready with a smile and a good word. Someone who can do almost anything short of walk on water, and someone who come to us at next to no cost to the parish. Truth is, that person does not exist and never will. Only God is perfect, so we need to set our expectations a little lower. It is here that maybe, just maybe, we need to listen for the Holy Spirit of God speaking into our discernment process.

We have a good sense of who we are and what we are doing on this island, as God’s people. At our upcoming Annual Vestry Meeting, you will be asked to approve the 2024 budget. It is a budget which parish council believes best reflects what we can expect throughout the year and what we can financially handle in our search for our next incumbent.

Soon, we will be organizing a team to review the parish profile. This group will be different from previous teams. There may be some new faces as part of the team. We believe this will bring new life to our discernment.

This is not the last time we will be speaking about our search process. More will be revealed as time goes forward. I pray that God will speak into each of our hearts during the coming days, and that the Holy Spirit will continue to guide us as we journey onward in faith.

Amen