

Vicar's Report to Vestry 2010

Delivered by Father David I. Giffen

Sunday February 14th at the 10am Combined Eucharist

I speak to you in the name of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

In his painting entitled, 'The Transfiguration,' Giovanni Bellini depicts Jesus disciples in three different poses, conveying three different attitudes with which each of us can identify. (1) *Get away as quickly as you possibly can!* In the face of the mystery and unknown nature of the situation before us, we feel overcome with a desire to flee. We feel the need to run because we don't want our reality drastically changed, our world turned too much upside down, by a God we cannot deny. (2) *To kneel in adoration.* Of the disciples depicted in the scene, this one is quite obviously Peter, who implores Jesus to build three monuments on the spot, preserving a 'Kodak Moment' so that they will never forget. His expression suggests that there is another part of the mystery which fascinates and entralls us all – a place where we might want to get lost, never wanting to move from the wonder, love and praise atop the proverbial mountaintop. (3) *Missing the extraordinary amidst the mundane.* The third attitude, centers not on the disciples witnessing the 'transfiguration' itself, but on the many other disciples, farmers and peasants going about their days upon the periphery of the scene – completely unaware of what is happening atop the hill.

The first attitude refuses to allow God to work in our lives. It screams, 'I like how things are already *and* I don't want things to change from the way they have always been.' The second attitude offers glory and praise to God, but, through it, we simply offer back to God, what God has given to us, without ever sharing it with the world. The third attitude reminds us that there is a multitude of people who were in the vicinity of this amazing act of God, but were either unable or unwilling to see it.

Over the last number of years, I have found myself praying to God for more people to attend church, praying that He would open the eyes of the members of the community around us, to enable them to see the church I love so much, as I see it. I have prayed that God would have them see a church of relevance, centered on social justice, art, music, and education; I prayed for eyes to rest upon a church focused on the betterment of humankind, humbly acknowledging its past mistakes, with its own eyes open to the future. Mine has been a well intentioned prayer, which, unfortunately, has been saying, "God, I've prayed for it – now *you* bring them in."

In January of last year, our Vestry expressed a desire for change. 'Business as usual' was no longer going to be enough. Not only was such an attitude going to prevent growth in our Cathedral Church, it was almost certainly going to contribute to its continued decline. A desire for a shift in priorities was both asked for and heard.

Growing up in household with a Chartered Accountant as a father, my Dad use to say to us kids as we got older, "Don't *tell me* what your priorities are, *show me your budget* and *I'll tell you* what your priorities are." With this philosophy in mind, our Cathedral has shifted our expenses during the last year to better reflect our priorities. This activity will be continued for the next year and well beyond.

First and foremost, we are a community which gathers to worship God, and our priorities reflect as such. In the midst of transition, both among the Clergy and the Musical Staff, we have not only avoided stagnation, but have witnessed *transformation* in many of the aspects which make us who we are.

Through the contributions of our world class Cathedral Choir, under the direction of our Acting Director of Music, Andrew Keegan Mackriell, music at Saint Paul's has reached unprecedented heights. Whether it is through the variety of new music, the magnificence of the vocal arrangement or the shift to include the congregation in more of the musical experience – the Cathedral music program vibrates with intensity and vitality.

Rather than continuing to offer a weekly evensong, which brought less than half a dozen parishioners together on Sunday evenings, we have shifted to a model which has been coined the Diocesan Evensong. Once each quarter, members of parish choirs from around the Diocese are being invited to join with the Cathedral choir to blend their voices in singing the evening office. Although this venture is in its infancy, the more than 120 people who have attended each of the first two services have affirmed our shift in direction.

As the pinnacle of the church year, Holy Week and Easter has seen the introduction of several liturgies that are new to Saint Paul's, such as the Mediation on the Passion, the Office of Tenebrae, and the Stations of the Cross. In 2009, the success of both Tenebrae and Stations urged us to add the additional service of meditation, which will take place on the evening of Palm Sunday in 2010.

Both the 9:15 and 11:00 o'clock congregations have welcomed changes to the bulletins over the last two years. Through the diligent work of the Cathedral staff the bulletin has become both a user-friendly introduction to worship for visiting parishioners, as well as a straightforward and simple guide for our Cathedral family.

Because of the many initiatives taken to welcome visitors who come through our doors on Sunday mornings, I am happy to report that eight new families have joined the Cathedral rolls in 2009.

At the 9:15am Eucharist, Children's Ministries grew in both size and scope during the last year. Under the leadership of Mary Mitches and Mary Townshend, the children are learning that they are not only the future of our church, but, more importantly, they are an essential and valued part of the church today! With the goal of fostering and nurturing the young families of our congregation, the Children's Ministry Team has instituted the 'Family Fun Night with Dinner and Games.' These Saturday afternoon and

evening events offer our young families an opportunity to come together as church, sharing in the breaking of bread and fellowship with one another.

Only a couple of month ago, we gathered together on a Friday evening in December to present the Cathedral's 'Children's Christmas Play.' Carling Dekay and Noah Crowe led the way with the speaking roles, and our Seminarian, Grayhame Bowcott, stole the show as 'Shepherd #3.' At present, there are more than 30 children under the age of seven registered with Children's Ministries. But we certainly have room for more.

Speaking of our Seminarian Grayhame, on January 1st, Grayhame completed his placement time for Theological Education at Saint Paul's and agreed to continue as our Pastor to Youth. This new paid position at the Cathedral has seen superb results in just its first year. In response to the need in the community, youth programming at Saint Paul's now offers three separate monthly events. A Junior Youth Group event, which now boasts over 30 members, a Senior Youth Group event, which rivals the junior with more than 20 members and the Crash the Cathedral Worship Service which brings Youth Groups from around the city, to gather together through contemporary worship, with music led by the Holy Family Life Teen Rock Band. I am pleased to report that the Cathedral continues to 'Crash' on Friday nights and will continue to for some time to come.

The fostering and caring for this particular age group, has seen the need for the creation of the junior youth group program on Sunday mornings, as well as five senior youth group members now training to become Altar Servers. As the Diocesan Cathedral, we hope to encourage other churches to address this need in the wider church.

Through the personal effort and leadership of Archdeacon Grant, aided by Deacon Pat and Reverend Ruth, the needs of the Cathedral's seniors' community continue to be met. The 'Strawberry Social' and the 'Senior's Christmas Communion and Tea' were gatherings which served much greater numbers in 2009 than in previous years. The establishment of the Grief and Bereavement Group has brought a new and important ministry to our community, reaching out and intentionally caring for those in our Church family, and beyond, who have lost a loved one in recent years. And by the many home, hospital and nursing home visits, which happen almost every day, our entire community continues to be cared for.

The program life of the parish will continue to grow and flourish throughout 2010 when we will pass the torch of Adult Education and Formation to the incoming Dean. The current agenda includes a vibrant evening study series from the 'Living the Question' program on Progressive Christianity, Thursday Afternoon Bible Studies, the annual Lenten Speaker Series, and much more.

Although our Clergy and lay staffing has decreased in recent years, both the quality and quantity of ministry at the Cathedral continues to increase and to be both transformative and life giving.

2009 saw the attendance increase slightly at both of the main Sunday morning liturgies – both congregations having become quite comparable in size. With an average Sunday attendance at 9:15 of around ninety (without a choir,) and an average Sunday attendance at 11:00 of about one hundred and forty (with a choir,) equal attention must be paid to both liturgical services.

In the coming year, with the arrival of a new Dean, the Cathedral must discern the future of Sunday morning worship at Saint Paul's – whether it will be through two congregations with different priorities and styles of worship, or a single congregation combined to bolster the best which each has to offer.

Inspired by the Magnetic Church conference, just a few years ago, our immensely gifted vocational Deacon, Pat Henderson, has led, what many believe to be the most important committee for the future of our Cathedral. The L.I.G.H.T.works Ministry Team consists of a group of parishioners whose ministry focuses on how the Cathedral welcomes the stranger into our midst. They suggest ways, that we, as a parish community, can include newcomers and visitors in the spirit of Christ's love and friendship. They help the members of the Cathedral family to consider how best to communicate effectively, about our parish life, to those who are new.

Through the deliberations of this committee and the generous bequests and gifts by a number of parishioners, we took some initial steps, in 2009, to reach London's wider community.

The Digital Sign, on the Southwest corner of the property, succinctly informs the public of the range of activities that are happening at the Cathedral – while at the same time proclaims to the world that we are indeed alive! The 'Welcome Wall' which you see upon entering our Clarence Street entrance can't help but draw your eyes to our colorful announcements and underscores the enthusiasm of our church family.

In November, the Warden's agreed to the bold move of appointing a Communications Officer for the Cathedral. Paul Grambo, who serves as our webmaster and editor of the transformed publication of *Chimes*, has been given the important responsibility for marketing and advertising our message to the public. We have already seen a noticeable response to Paul's work through coverage in the media of events taking place here, and the reaction to both our online and printed advertising campaigns upon which we have embarked.

A number of weeks ago, we hosted a benefit concert for relief in the devastated country of Haiti. The concert, which raised almost \$5,000, went on for about four hours on a Saturday afternoon, and was advertised as a 'drop-in' and 'drop-out' affair. It

was a cold day outside, as Grayhame and I can attest to, having stood at the Great West Doors, welcoming visitors, throughout much of the afternoon. We had propped open the Cathedral's historic entrance doors, as well as the side doors to the Narthex. My thought, was that if we opened the doors, and the public walking by heard the inspirational music emerging from inside, they might just feel called to enter in. But on multiple different occasions throughout the day, multiple different people from within the Cathedral attempted to close the doors.

It struck me both figuratively, and literally, that if we are so afraid to let the cold get into our building, we will never be able to let the warmth get out.

I have spent almost a half decade growing up within this outstanding edifice that we call Saint Paul's Cathedral. I have been formed by this community, and I have been transformed by the love I have been given here. By you, and through you, I have become a priest.

As a proud member of this family, I can honestly say that there is nothing broken about who we are as Church – what is broken is not *who*, but *how* we are. If we cannot wedge every door to this place open, so wide that all the world might see in; if we do not leave this place telling everyone we know about how transformative God's love can be; if we do not proclaim Christ crucified as loudly in our lives as we do within these walls – then we are not living out our missional call, and we are not *how* we should be.

Bellini's portrait of 'The Transfiguration' teaches us that the divine, the immaculate, and the celestial are all happening in places that surround us; that the transfiguration is happening right in front of our eyes, and that it happens every single day at this Church. God *has answered my prayer* for a church like no other, again and again and again. God *has answered my prayer* for a place of relevance and justice, of art and of music, and now it is *our* turn – to open our doors and to wear our church as our badge of honour – to tell the world what God is transforming here.

The gospel this morning concludes with the statement "...they kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen." Well, my brothers and sisters, my Cathedral family, 'those days' are over. The generations of a church within its own walls *must* come to an end. Let *us* step forward to build up this church we call home and let us hammer our doors wide open. For God's light shines bright within this place – let us shine it *out* onto the world.

Thanks be to God.