Dear Friends,

In the early Church one of the most common proofs given for Christ’s divinity was that he had walked on the stormy sea towards his disciples in their storm-tossed boat. The boat is an ancient symbol for the Church. If this year has been a time of stormy seas, then Jesus has continued to walk on the waters towards his Church, reassuring us and inviting us to know that “all will be well” and that we can follow him with confidence. This year I am very grateful to our parish leadership, and to all of you, as you have followed this same Jesus who continues to come to his disciples in the boat.

During the past few years, we have specifically focused on the building blocks that are the foundation of any parish. Put simply as the great Methodist/Anglican theologian Stanley Hauerwas put it, “the job of the Church, is to be the Church”. And it is exactly that that we have been working on. We have called this process, of attending to the basic building blocks of the Church, as “Building the Body of Christ”.

Some might quibble that it is Christ himself who builds up his Body, that we are not saved by good works. This is true. But it is also true that we, his disciples, have been given the means to strengthen this gift, his Body. The Bible is full of instructions as how Jesus’ followers should do just that.

I can do no better than to repeat what I wrote for our AGM last year (the last Sunday that we met together as it turned out) with minor modifications.

*By building the body of Christ we mean strengthening the bonds among us and between us. I*t means to be *stronger* as a community. *To get to know one another better,* to talk, pray, work, study and have fun together.

*By building the body of Christ we mean to strengthen our life as a group of people formed together as an Anglican parish in union with our Archbishop.* Groups of people always *organize* in order to be together. So, we want to take care of our organization. This involves caring for the house of prayer where we meet, the people who lead us and help keep things running and attending to how we structure and maintain our parish. Keeping our frame strong.

*By building the Body of Christ we mean to be more united with Christ ourselves that we more and more become his body.* That happens though these simple starting from Baptism and the Eucharist. Out of this daily prayer, reading of the Bible, serving those who are in at time or condition of need and so serving Christ himself.

*By building the Body of Christ we mean the baptism and integration of new members into his body, building it.* That happens when we invite and truly *integrate and form* new people into his body through baptism and confirmation, or in the case of those who already Christians through really making space and welcoming their ministries.

*By building the Body of Christ we mean ensuring that this body continues to be built through the young* to whom we owe a special responsibility in a chaotic world to help make them strong, knowledgeable and joyful in Jesus.

*By building the Body of Christ we mean that our bodies need also to be healed.* Our actual bodies are united with Christ’s body. So, we learn to seek and accept the Lord’s healing for our bodies and souls. We value the sacraments of healing and the power of prayer. And we honour the bodies of the faithful departed and bear witness in the wider community to the Christ’s resurrection and ours with him.

Our ministries this past year have been built on these commitments. For example, our major project this year, the Bishop Ford Memorial Garden is a direct response to this. That is, in a culture that is increasingly deeply confused by death, Christians honour the faithful departed who are united to Christ in one Body. And as direct testimony to our community that Christians say, in the words of priest/poet John Donne “Death be not proud”. Because Christ is Risen. And so, we invite the community beyond us to begin, once again, with us, to honour the infinite value and dignity of every human life.

This is *just one example* (and there are very many more) of how we have built up the Body of Christ. This will continue to be the foundation for everything that we do in the year ahead. This will also be the case in the months ahead as, following my retirement at the end of May, you work with the Archdeacon who will assist you in searching for a new Incumbent to be appointed by the Archbishop.

This process will be clearly laid out for everyone and will involve your input and the direction of All Saints’ parish. But I would like to draw your attention to a few things about the life of our parish which I very much encourage you to keep in mind during the next year.

First, as you move forward it is important to know that this parish church is (as Stanley Hauerwas puts it) very much fulfilling its purpose: “to be the Church”. The Archbishop has on more than one occasion said, “I don’t what it is about being here, but I just love to be here”. If I may be so bold, I might suggest that it is the presence of Christ. First of all, his presence in Tabernacle where it is present in his Body and Blood. And from this, Christ is present in you. This is a delightful community. We are full of Christ’s light and free of rancour. By this, God-forbid, I don’t mean people never disagree (that would mean we are asleep). But rather, you are gracious, full of good humour and good will. This parish is radiant with the Light of Christ. I invite you to celebrate this same reality that the Archbishop sees in you and among you.

Second, it has been a gift to be your rector and I am very attached to the people of our parish (including those who have gone before us). For some of you, I may be the first Incumbent you have known. But I want to assure you, Christ was very much already present when I arrived and will be very much present as you move forward. Christ will bless you with Fr Tony, as your priest-in-charge, with your wardens and other lay leadership, with your other clergy and, in the not-too-distant future, with your new Incumbent. Be confident in that, trust God as he leads you forward.

Third, the work which you have been doing and the ministries you are offering are the foundation for your way forward. You, following the guidance of the Holy Spirit have built a strong foundation. Your new Incumbent will lead you into continuing to build on what is already here. You will continue to “Build the Body of Christ” together.

I, on more than one occasion, came into a new parish as its rector. I can tell you, from my own experience, that any new priest would be delighted to walk into a parish which (even given the current pandemic) is in the state of heart and mind and ministry that All Saints is in.

Finally, remember that everything begins and ends with Christ. That means that our life of prayer, reading of scripture and (soon God-willing) is the fountain of our life. It is the source of everything we do and everything we are. Nothing else works. This is the foundation.

Christ is made the sure foundation,
Christ the head and cornerstone,
chosen of the Lord and precious,
binding all the church in one;
holy Zion's help forever,
and her confidence alone.

Thank you to the superb leadership of this parish in all areas of ministry: from our faithful and deeply committed corporation and parish council, our amazing office staff, our wonderful group clergy, our inspiring musical and tech team, our extremely qualified Sunday School and A-Z leadership, our Youth and small group leaders and on and on. I wish I could name every group and every person, but that would be a long report. And to you all.

I commend to God and thank all of you. I pray for you as you move forward together. Christ will lead you as you Build the Body of Christ. Christ who walks on the water toward you and before you.

Respectfully Submitted

The Rev. Greg Clark

Incumbent