

An Email Circulated to the Members of the Parish of St. Francis-in-the-Wood by Reverend Stuart on Thursday, September 16.

Well, it has taken me a few days to process the wonderful send-off Christine and I were given last Sunday for my final Sunday Eucharist as Rector of St. Francis-in-the-Wood. In fact, actually I think I am going to be processing all this for quite some time to come, not just the send-off but the past seventeen years or so since I first came to St. Francis when we flew over for the interviews in October 2004. In fact our first service at St. Francis was on October 2 when the parish was marking the Feast Day of our Patron Saint, Francis of Assisi.

It all began over a year before that, in June 2003, when I was visiting UBC for a Thomas Merton conference. Many have heard me recount (numerous times!) the story of how on that first morning I was there I went into the kitchen of the apartment I was staying in at the Gage Towers on the UBC campus, and I looked out the window and was almost physically knocked back by the sight of overwhelming natural beauty. Blue skies, snow-capped mountains, wooded hillsides, calm green sea. But more than this overwhelming natural beauty, the word that was coming into my mind was "home." Home - but this was not my home, and at that point there seemed little possibility that it ever would be. I couldn't imagine Christine agreeing to uproot our growing family (Aaron was nearly 13, Anna Mae nearly 10) and move halfway around the world. But these feelings of nostalgia and homesickness for a place I'd never lived were even more perplexing because I was at the conference to give a paper on the connections between what we see in our outer world and who we are in our inner world... I can't say I thought no more about it. Obviously, I did think more about it, and when I returned to England after the conference I can remember telling people how I'd love my next job to be in Canada! But I had no idea how specific this calling to "home" was until Christine and I arrived early for the service on that Sunday in October 2004 and walked down to the end of Pilot House Road and looked across the water, and I could see the Gage Towers. Only then did I realize where I had been looking on that June morning in 2003 when I heard the word "home." I was standing right there!

So we came. Six of us. Christine and I, Aaron (rising 15) and Anna (rising 12), and our cats Jake & Elwood (who sadly, of course, are no longer with us). And we spent many happy years in the Rectory and in this neighbourhood as the children grew into adulthood and gradually flew the nest. So many happy memories, so many happy times. And I think of all the people we have known here over the years, many no longer with us. When I looked through a parish list from 2006 recently, I counted about 50 names of people who have since died. I mentioned some of their names on Sunday.

And I have thought about all those who have served as Churchwarden over these years, and counted up 23 names (some serving more than one term). Incidentally, all my past Churchwardens are still alive, so I guess that says something about the health benefits of being a Churchwarden! I am grateful to all of them for giving their time and energy to the life and welfare of the parish. Their commitment, and the commitment of so many, make the church the vibrant community that it is.

On Sunday, I also mentioned my colleagues who I have had the pleasure to work with over the years:

Parish Administrators - Ellen Luccock, Shannon Hunt (summer supply), Deborah Young, Lynn Coules, Mark Galvani, Liz Young, Leah Pan (who was there on Sunday), and our current Parish Administrator Carol Dawson. They have all done extremely well, especially in coping with my sometimes erratic working practices and improvisational approaches to things, and I am grateful to all of them for making sure that things turn out "right side up."

Our **Youth Director**, Phil Colvin who originally came for (hopefully) at least three years and ended up staying six or seven years, and who also produced the Parish Newsletter over those years.

Our **Music Directors** - Kevin Zakresky who was here when I first arrived; then from summer 2006 Caitlin Bradley (as she was then) now Beaupre who has done an amazing job over all these years, and especially when we made the switch to YouTube online services in 2020 she was able to begin producing high quality audio and video recordings within the space of a week! And our current Interim Music Director Tom Arntzen who has had to get up to speed incredibly quickly and also adapt to rapidly changing circumstances (moving from online back to in-person). And I am especially grateful to Tom for the special song he composed for me and performed at the barbecue with his jazz trio - "[All the People Say Thank You!](#)"

Also **Clergy** I have worked with here - Emilie Smith who covered my first Sabbatical in 2009 and various other times when I was away and who led a youth mission trip to Guatemala with Youth Director Phil Colvin and me in 2010; Don Grayston (peace be upon him) who provided supply cover for the nearly two years (2010 and 2011) when we partnered with St. Monica's before Janice joined us in November 2011; John Kessel who was a parishioner and also an ordained Lutheran minister who was kind enough to assist from time to time with taking services, preaching, and leading courses and workshops; Janice Lowell was with us from 2011 to 2019 (full time at St. Francis from December 2013); and then Alecia Greenfield as Curate from September 2019 until just this past June when she went on to be Vicar of Holy Cross in Vancouver. It was great to see that she made it for the end of our celebration on Sunday. Again, I do not know how we would have fared in the pandemic if it had not been for having Alecia whose drive got us up and running with the YouTube services and with Zoom, and then just before she left, she initiated the set-up for live-streaming with the return to in-person services.

I am grateful for the support, guidance and counsel of the three **Bishops** under whom I have served: Michael Ingham, who I was delighted to see there on Sunday, and who also welcomed me into the exclusive club of ex-Rectors of St. Francis-in-the-Wood; Melissa Skelton; and our current Bishop, John Stephens.

There are too many people to thank by name for all the contributions of time, energy, and resources (including money) over the years; some I know and I am grateful for; some I do not know of, but I am also grateful for. It would be remiss of me however not to mention **Penny Mitchell**, who as far as I can tell masterminded and coordinated Sunday's spectacular send-off, and for all the volunteers who assisted her in this (again, some of you I know, others I am not aware of, so it would be invidious of me to mention names, but please know that I am very grateful). I have also received numerous individual messages - emails, cards, texts - wishing me well in the next stage of my life-journey. I will respond to each one individually in due time, but it may take a little while.

And what does the next stage of my life-journey hold for me? - you may be asking, and some have asked me. You may know of my interest in acting, with my dramatizations of the Gospels of Mark and John, and I hope to pick this up again once the pandemic is finally over and we can plan in-person performances again with some degree of confidence. But I have also become quite interested in the whole art of acting, and have even become involved in film and TV and, as you may have heard at the barbecue, have made a few faltering steps into this area with some [on screen performances](#). So, we'll see if and where that might lead. I am also looking forward to getting back to playing my guitar (and ukulele); and working on my photography; plus travel - perhaps that camper-van will soon become a

reality, and I'd love to get a kayak; then there are all those books to read, and records to listen to... Plus I need to get back to the gym! So, I'm not going to be idle - though I intend still to seek and build in times of stillness and silence in my life for the nourishment of my soul.

How about St. Francis-in-the-Wood: what is next for you? Well, I don't know of course but I am confident that the church is in a very good and healthy position right now, especially in terms of energy and involvement (notwithstanding the ongoing pandemic impedance), and even in terms of finances, thanks to a number of grants and subsidies from the Government and from the Diocese. And I am very happy that you have Stephanie Shepard to guide you through this time of transition until the next Rector is appointed - incidentally, the next Rector is out there somewhere, so let's start praying for that person right now, pray them into the parish - maybe they'll be standing out there somewhere unsuspecting and hear the word "home" pop into their heads, and the journey will begin all over again...

Lastly (but not least!), I have to say what I should have said on Sunday, but in the excitement of the moment (and not having notes) I overlooked to say, is my huge gratitude to my family - my children Aaron and Anna, who never chose to be the children of a priest but who bore it all bravely and I don't think have come out of it too scarred; and most of all to my partner-in-crime, my dear (long-suffering) wife Christine who not only agreed to this crazy idea of moving halfway round the world but has supported me unstintingly and without reservation throughout the years, and throughout a number of challenging times. It has been wonderful to have been here, but it has not always been easy. That is life - for all of us; that's how we grow. But it is Christine's presence, love and support (as well as challenging questions sometimes) that have got me through such times and enabled me (and all of us) to emerge stronger and healthier. Thank you, Christine - on behalf of all of us! Especially me.

And thank you again to everyone in this parish community who have offered their love, presence and support over the years; thank you for the leaving gifts we were presented with on Sunday: Christine and I are looking forward to our getaway to the Wickaninnish Inn, and the very generous cheque (some of which may fund that kayak!); and the wonderful photobook which contains so many special memories - incidentally, the photobook will remain on the cabinet in the parish office just outside my office door until the end of the month for people who might like to look through the pictures and/or sign in the back (if you haven't done so already). That's all in addition to Tom's original song complete with a framed copy of the words and music!

If you have not had a chance to see my last Sunday Eucharist at St. Francis-in-the-Wood, or would like to view it again, you can find it on our website here: <https://www.stfrancisinthewood.ca/livestreams/18>

I will keep you in my prayers; please keep me in yours!

And with that, thank you and farewell!

Pax+Bonum,

Angus

Rev. Dr. Angus Stuart