

To the Vestries of St. Andrew's, St. George's, St. James, St. Mary's and St. Philip's

In his charge to Synod, Archbishop David cited some important statistics in Canada, as follows:

- In 2021, 53% of Canadians identified as Christian – a decrease from 67% in 2011. In New Brunswick this means that 512,645 people identified as Christian (a decrease of 104,000). Of this number, 35,205 say they are Anglican, compared to 54,270 ten years ago.
- Sadly, these statistics follow a trend in North America: in 1970, the number who identified as Anglican was 4,395,000. In 2015, that number had dropped to 2,549,000.

The Archbishop went on to say, *“For a multitude of reasons our society has been turning away from God, and to a greater extent God’s Church, for more than fifty years. No matter what has been tried through programs, plans and initiatives, this has not been reversed. It is a time to question and discern if what we have and are holding on to is helping us become what God wants us to be....If we can recognize the truth of our situation and accept it, then perhaps we can allow God to do something about it.”*

This assessment resonates with a letter which Jeremiah the Prophet wrote to the people of Israel who had been carried away as captives from Jerusalem to Babylon in 597 B.C.. Delivering the Word of the Lord, Jeremiah said, *“Build houses and live in them; and plant gardens and eat the fruit of them; take wives and have sons and daughters....Do not let your prophets and your diviners who are among you deceive you, neither listen to your dreams which you dream. For they prophesy falsely to you.”* (29. 5- 8)

The question from all of this is whether we believe there is a connection to our situation. Do we believe the statistics? Do we see them as true prophecy? If so, are we prepared to take action that fits with Jeremiah’s letter: build houses, plant gardens, marry and have children?

In reflecting on this question, we request the Congregations to consider the following proposal at their Annual Meetings, and refer to their Vestries for discussion, if required. We request a formal response, during the last week of May 2023.

That parishes and parish corporations be aligned into one (including the sharing of clergy, one Vestry, one bank account for operating purposes, one parish administrator/office, one parish website, etc.).

That said, building maintenance bank accounts, ACW/Willing Worker funds, Memorial Funds, etc would all remain ‘as is’ and under the control of their Congregations/groups).

Towards this goal of becoming one parish, we invite you to consider how we can maintain a visible presence in our communities by keeping our present Church buildings and sharing the building costs with community partners.

This may involve disposing of a Church building and, with a community partner, establishing a Chapel under the same Church name, in a new construction.

May the Lord help us in our deliberations to seek His will, and to believe that, despite the present decline, He is building His Church as He promised to manifest His glory.

Yours in Christian fellowship,

Wendy Amos-Binks Rob Salloum Chris VanBuskirk

In Epiphany-tide: 17 January 2023