

**A Letter from the Reverend Patrick Blaney to the Parishioners of St. John's North
Vancouver, read in part at the service on Sunday, August 30, 2026**

My dear friends in Christ,

There are some letters one hopes never to have to write. This is one of them.

After much thought, prayer, and conversation with my doctor, my Spiritual Director, and my partner Christopher, I have made the very difficult decision to step down as Rector of St. John's. I am doing so because of my ongoing struggles with mental illness and because I have come to understand that I need to give my health the attention and time it now requires.

I want to be clear about that. I am resigning because of mental illness. I have preached about mental illness before, and I do not believe I should now hide behind phrases such as "health concerns" or "personal reasons." We have learned, slowly, to bring so many things out of the closet and into the light. It is time for mental illness to come out of the closet as well.

Mental illness is illness. It can touch any one of us, and faith, however deep and genuine, does not make us immune from it. And since I have always believed that humour can get us through some very difficult places, I suppose I should acknowledge the obvious: after fourteen years, your Rector has finally gone nuts. Some of you, of course, may feel this merely confirms a long-held suspicion.

Throughout these past months, you have prayed for me. I want you to know that those prayers have mattered. I have quite literally felt them in my heart, even in the darkest times. There were moments when I did not have many prayers of my own to offer, and I knew that you were praying for me. There is something extraordinarily powerful about knowing that when you cannot find the words yourself, the Church is holding you before God.

Thank you. I cannot say that strongly enough. Thank you for every prayer, every kind thought, every message, and every quiet expression of concern and love.

Fourteen years is a long time to share a journey.

During those years we have worshipped together, laughed together, grieved together, celebrated together, struggled together, changed together, and, I hope, grown together. We have welcomed new people and said goodbye to beloved friends and loved ones. We have baptized, married, buried, celebrated the Eucharist, marked the great festivals of our faith, sat through meetings, balanced budgets, faced challenges, tried new things, occasionally got things wrong, and then tried again. And of course we ate lots of great meals together.

And through it all, St. John's has remained St. John's.

I wish I could thank everyone individually. Fourteen years creates an impossibly long list, and if I attempted it, this letter would become a small book. But I am going to break my own rule and mention just a few people by name.

To Donna and Leeann, my enormous thanks for being such outstanding Office Administrators—and, perhaps even more impressively, for consistently making me look considerably better at running things than I actually was. Every Rector should be so fortunate. I am so very grateful to you both.

To our poet-caretaker, Russell, my heartfelt thanks for decades of dedicated service to St. John's. So much of what you have done has happened quietly and without fanfare, but it has never gone unnoticed or unappreciated.

And although she may not particularly want it, a very big hug to Hazel. In fourteen years, I quite literally cannot remember a Sunday when you were not there. Your faithfulness to St. John's is something quite extraordinary, and it has meant more to me than you probably know.

To my colleague and dear friend Jill: take the torch, keep the faith, and grab your dream. You have gifts to offer the Church, and I hope you will always have the courage to follow wherever God is calling you.

To Yasmine, the longest-serving Warden during my years at St. John's: your gift of loving leadership changed the way I understand faith in action. You taught me something important about the kind of leadership that comes not from position or authority, but from love, faithfulness, and service. I will carry that lesson with me.

To Alison and Kathryn. Throughout it all, I have been enormously grateful for your wisdom, honesty, strength, and support. Your leadership of St. John's has been, quite simply, outstanding. You have never regarded being Wardens as merely holding positions or attending meetings. You have understood it as a ministry of service and leadership, and the parish has been immeasurably stronger because of it. I am so very grateful to have you as our Wardens. You are truly an inspiration to me in more ways than I can say.

To Bob. You have been one of those people upon whom St. John's could always simply depend upon, whatever the circumstances. But your contribution has gone far beyond numbers, budgets, and balance sheets. Your leadership, both at St. John's and within the Diocese, particularly during the extraordinary challenges of COVID, was remarkable. At a time when none of us quite knew what was coming next, you brought calm, wisdom, and a much needed steadiness of purpose. Underneath it all was something even more important: an enormous faith in the Church and an abiding faith in God. Bob, your quiet, faithful leadership has taught me a great deal, and St. John's has been immeasurably stronger because of you. Thank you.

And Galina—my usually dependable supply of words rather fails me here. Wow. Just wow. What an extraordinary privilege it has been to have your remarkable talent guide us in our sacred music. You have given St. John's so much more than beautiful music. Through your extraordinary gift, you have deepened our worship, given expression to our joy and our sorrow, and, at times, many times, allowed us to hear something of the beauty and mystery of God. "Thank you" seems entirely inadequate, but it comes from my heart.

Finally, to Christie. You have brought extraordinary energy and enthusiasm to the life of St. John's. You strive for excellence in everything you do, but somehow you have always managed to make the pursuit of excellence fun—and that is a rare gift. You have a remarkable instinct for finding new music that is not simply beautiful, but meaningful and powerfully moving, music that has helped us hear familiar words of faith in entirely new ways. And through all of it, there has been that wonderful sense of humour. We have teased one another mercilessly over the years, and I have treasured every minute of it. Beneath all the jokes has always been genuine affection and enormous respect. Thank you, Christie, for your talent, your energy, your laughter, and for everything you have given to St. John's. It has been an absolute joy to work with you.

To all of you whom I have named, and particularly to the hundreds more whom I could have named: thank you. You are part of what makes St. John's such an extraordinary community.

St. John's has been blessed with remarkably strong lay leadership. That is one of the great strengths of this parish, and it is one of the reasons I have such confidence in its future. A healthy parish is never the creation of its Rector. It is the work of the whole people of God, bringing their different gifts together in the service of Christ and one another.

I have had the extraordinary privilege of working with a succession of unbelievably wonderful Wardens. Each brought different gifts, different personalities, different wisdom, and different ways of seeing things. They supported me, challenged me, advised me, occasionally reined me in, and shared with me the responsibility and privilege of caring for this parish. I owe all of them a debt of gratitude that I could never adequately express.

To our Choir: thank you. You have done so much more than provide music. You have helped us pray. You have lifted our hearts, carried us through sorrow, and given voice to our joy. Music has always been an essential part of the spiritual life of St. John's, and I have been enormously grateful for your ministry.

To the Altar Guild: thank you for the countless hours of quiet, faithful service that most people never see. Sunday after Sunday, season after season, you have prepared our sacred space for the worship of God. Much of the most important work in a church happens when nobody is watching, and yours is a beautiful example of that.

To our Caring Ministry, who for so many years faithfully visited and cared for parishioners who could no longer come to church: you were remarkable in every sense of what it means to carry our faith beyond the walls of St. John's and into the lives of others. You reminded us that the Church does not end at our doors, and that sometimes its most important ministry happens quietly, one person sitting beside another. And I want particularly to thank Madeline and Linda. In your compassion, your faithfulness, and your simple willingness to be present for others, you taught me something about what Christian service really means. More than once, in watching the two of you care for others, made me a witness of what it means to be Christ-like. There can be no greater gift to a priest—or to a parish—than that.

And then there are the hundreds of volunteers who, over these fourteen years, have given their time, energy, imagination, compassion, humour, and love to this parish. You have served on committees, read lessons, welcomed newcomers, prepared coffee, cared for the building, tended gardens, helped with worship, raised money, visited people, organized events, taught, cooked, cleaned, planned, carried, scheduled readers and intercessors, decorated, repaired, listened, prayed, and done a thousand other things that make St. John's what it is.

You are the Church.

You are what makes St. John's such a fantastic place to grow—in Spirit and as people.

I have spent much of my life working with words, and I think of myself as a pretty good writer. Yet I find myself strangely unable to find words adequate to describe just how special St. John's really is. Perhaps that is because the most important things in our lives eventually become too large for words.

St. John's has been much more to me than the parish where I happened to be the Rector. You have allowed me into your lives. You trusted me with your joys and your griefs, your marriages and baptisms, your illnesses and deaths, your questions and doubts, your celebrations and fears. You allowed me to stand beside you at some of the most sacred moments of your lives.

That is an extraordinary privilege, and one I have never taken lightly.

I hope that somewhere along the way I have given something to you as well. I hope I helped some of you see God a little differently, or discover that there was room in the Church for your questions. I hope I made you laugh occasionally. I hope that when life was difficult, I helped you remember that you did not have to face it alone. Most of all, I hope that together we came to understand a little more deeply what it means to love God and to love one another.

Now, after fourteen years, my part of this particular journey with you is coming to an end.

There is sadness in saying that. A great deal of sadness. But there is also profound gratitude.

Please do not be afraid for St. John's. Rectors come and go. The Church remains. The Holy Spirit has been at work in this place for a very long time, and I have no reason to believe She intends to stop now.

Trust your Wardens. Trust your lay leadership. Trust one another. And above all, trust God.

Continue to be the generous, questioning, occasionally stubborn, compassionate, faithful, wonderfully human community I have come to know and love.

And please continue to pray for me. I will continue to pray for you.

Thank you for allowing me the enormous privilege of being your Rector. Thank you for walking with me, and for allowing me to walk with you, through these past fourteen years.

I cannot put into words how much St. John's has meant to me.

So perhaps, in the end, the simplest words are the right ones.

Thank you.

I love you.

And may God bless St. John's, now and forever, and always.

Patrick