



Feast of The Conversion of St. Paul – January 25<sup>th</sup>, 2020

Dear friends in Algoma,

It's nearing the end of January. We've got the mid winter blahs. We're snivelling and fighting the flu. We're tired of shovelling the white stuff. Our December Visa bill has just been paid, and we're broke. Now the fridge needs repairing, the car servicing, and there are meetings to attend, reports to write, a mountain of work we can't put off now that the holidays are really, really over.

There's a great flurry of activity in Algoma which will continue as clergy and wardens, treasurers and committee chairs write reports for Annual Vestry Meetings in their church. I urge you to attend that meeting, for in so doing you will discover that church isn't just what happens on Sunday mornings; there are numbers of faithful followers of Jesus working hard behind the scenes every day of the week to support the vitality, vibrancy, and faithfulness of your congregation. You might find yourself inspired to become more involved in the mission and ministry of your congregation as you offer your God-given gifts for the greater good of the church.

Thank you, one and all, for your faithfulness and dedication to the ministry and mission of your congregation and parish, all of which contribute to the building up the body of Christ far beyond the walls within which you worship.

Read this invitation to an Annual Vestry meeting by the Rector of one of the congregations in our diocese.

*“You are invited to come and participate in the discussion at the Annual Vestry meeting of our congregation. Some of the important issues are highlighted below. What concerns me as your pastor, is your relationship to God. Our seats are not always full, our budget is not always balanced, our actions are not always good, for we are an idolatrous people, we live in a generation that has idealized sex, glamorized gluttony, emphasized vanity and ostracized God.*

*My prayer is that God, the Holy Spirit will fill you with his grace and blessing, that we may be known as a quiet and godly people, full of love for each other, and willing to serve in every possible way. God is calling us into a deeper walk with him, into more costly living and giving. I will be praying for each and every one of you who are members of this parish. I expect that you will also remember each other in your prayers. Come to the Annual meeting and take your rightful place in our congregation.*

*Some of the issues we are facing:*

*Interest payments on our loan.*

*The education of our young people: How effective is our programme?*

*Worship Facilities. How soon can we expect to have adequate facilities?*

*Christian Mission: In what way are we really reaching out into the world in which we live?*

*Cooperation with other churches: Are we really prepared to be a brotherhood?*

*Reports from the organizations and the Wardens will be considered. New members to the board will be elected. The Financial report will be presented and then we will get on with the issues. Hope to see you. “*

It's quite the invitation, isn't it? But hear this - it was extended to a congregation way back in 1965! Some of you might find it reassuring that way back in the roaring 60s 'nickels and numbers' were causing angst in our parishes. How exciting that the incumbent was calling the parish to ask the bigger questions of discipleship around the church's sense of **Christian mission in the world** as well as deepening their **relationships with other denominations**. In baptism Christians are called into relationship with Jesus Christ only to be sent out into the world to be his witnesses. (Matthew 28: 19-20)

**“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”**

These two things - reaching out to others in Jesus' name, and growing our friendships with our brothers and sisters in the ecumenical community - continue to be important for us as Anglican Christians in 2020. When you meet as a parish in vestry, take the time to name the ways in which you are looking beyond the walls of your own church and are engaging in your local communities and with other denominations. When things are challenging in the parish and the outlook seems bleak, it's often easier to look inward and protect any remaining assets for a “rainy day.”

I've been visiting clericus groups in Algoma. I am encouraged by the stories of ministry and mission beyond church walls that are happening with ecumenical partners in every deanery. One congregation has named the Girl's School in Tarime as their outreach project for 2020. Another is working with other local congregations to run an Alpha program; sixty people are signed up for it. Many others are continuing to work together to support local programs in their communities against poverty, homelessness, and youth suicide.



## **“They showed us unusual kindness” (Acts 28.2)**



*Photos from the Service for Christian Unity at St. Paul's Thunder Bay*

How appropriate that the theme for this year's Week of Prayer for Christian Unity focused on the *unusual kindness* offered by the local residents of Malta to St. Paul and those travelling with him when their ship was wrecked off the Malta coast! Wet, cold, and hungry, those who had been shipwrecked huddle around a fire, where God's loving care surrounds them in the care of strangers. They are fed and sheltered until they are able to continue their journey. The people who help them neither know them nor understand them, and yet they reach out with love and compassion. It is often when we are at our wit's end that a complete stranger extends the hand of care and friendship to us. In those moments neither race, nor age, nor status matter.

Many of you will have attended, or participated in this year's service of prayer prepared by Christians in Malta. During the prayers, eight oars were brought into the assembly by members of different communities. Each oar bore a single word –

**Reconciliation**

**Enlightenment**

**Hope**

**Trust**

**Strength**

**Hospitality**

**Conversion**

**Generosity**

Hopeful words for us to live by in the coming year as we face the storms of life:

Personal challenges with relationships, finances, poverty, homelessness, illness or death.

Challenges that all of our churches face as we row against the growing tide of secularism and indifference to faith and religion.

Differences around matters of human sexuality that continue to divide us.

The present environmental crisis in the world which is causing extreme weather conditions around the globe resulting in destructive floods, fires, snowstorms. Loss of life and irreparable damage to local communities is just one aspect of this crisis.

The assembly at each service of Prayer for Christian Unity was reminded that we cannot face those storms alone, whatever they may be. Rather, working together with others we know that a boat moves forward when all row together. In the face of difficulties we recognise the need to pull together and unite our efforts rather than working against one another or creating new divisions.

The idea of us all pulling together resonates with me in a particular way right now as we prepare for the Special Synod on May 8<sup>th</sup>, 2020. As you know I have called it so the diocese may bring advice to me on the question of same sex marriage. In the days and weeks leading up to this Synod, may we show one another "Unusual Kindness", especially those we disagree with on this matter.

I give thanks for the mission and ministry we share in Jesus Christ, and I look forward to reading your Annual Vestry Reports when they are submitted to the Synod office.

Every blessing as you show one another unusual kindness.

**+Anne**



*“Working together with others we know that a boat moves forward when all row together.”*

### ***Prayers from the Service for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity***

*Loving God, your Son Jesus Christ broke bread and shared the cup with his friends on the eve of his passion. May we grow together in closer communion. Following the example of Paul and the early Christians, give us strength to build bridges of compassion, solidarity and harmony. In the power of the Holy Spirit, we ask this in the name of your Son, who gives his life that we might live. Amen.*

*God of the orphan, the widow and the stranger, instill in our hearts a deep sense of hospitality. Open our eyes and hearts when you ask us to feed you, to clothe you and to visit you. May our churches participate in the ending of hunger, thirst and isolation and in overcoming barriers that prevent the welcome of all people. We ask this in the name of your Son, Jesus, who is present in the least of our sisters and brothers. Amen.*