

HOLY TRINITY WOODBURN

ANNUAL GENERAL EASTER VESTRY 2013

Good evening everyone. Welcome to the Annual General Vestry Meeting of Holy Trinity. This is the 13th time I have addressed such a meeting of this parish. After such a period of time it is hard not to repeat oneself and I have resisted the temptation to just change the date and a few names etc from last year's address. Mainly because you have it in front of you as part of the minutes from last year's Easter Vestry meeting.

The Queen in a Christmas address once described the previous year as 'anus horribillis' and that might be how you have viewed the past 12 months both personally and collectively as a Church. Personally I would concur with Charles Dickens who at the beginning of 'A Tale of Two Cities' writes 'It was the best of times and it was the worst of times.' I believe that is a fairer and more balanced description of the past year at Holy Trinity. I want to spend a few moments addressing the past 12 months in the life of this parish. To be very honest it is the proverbial elephant in the room and it needs addressed at this Easter General Vestry Meeting.

I think it is fair to say that we are in a better place this April than we found ourselves last April. The past 12 months have been very difficult for us all as a parish and yet I think when we look back we can see the hand of God blessing us as a congregation in the midst of all the difficulties that we encountered and experienced. We have grown in fellowship with God and one another through the past 12 months and, as I have often heard in Uganda, we can say: God is good, all the time, all the time, God is good. That is a lesson I have learned and

relearned over the past year. It is a lesson I hope I never forget and something for which I pray I will be thankful till the day God calls me home.

I think it would be correct to say that if it was our choice then none of us would have chosen to go through the past 12 months. Yet, as I look back I am just amazed at where we are now and of all that has been achieved in those 12 months.

I want to put on record my thanks to the Select Vestry for their hard work over the past year. They have carried an enormous burden and they have done so with grace, with wisdom, with great humility and determination to seek God's will and blessing on this parish. It was humbling at times to sit in Vestry meetings and to hear people speak with faith in what God was teaching us, what He was calling us to do and what He was doing in, and through the people of, this parish in the past 12 months. I do not mind saying there were Vestry meetings where we knew that only for the intervention of God in this situation we quite literally would have had to close the doors of this church.

It is no exaggeration to say that only for the prayers and generosity of the people of this parish we would have had to go to the diocese and ask to be reduced from parish status or to close the doors. That is not an exaggeration and I do not want in any way to make light of the perilous situation we found ourselves in this time last year and for many months over the summer of 2012. The Select Vestry have carried that burden and they have worked collectively to lift that burden with your help from off the shoulders of this parish. I believe we as a congregation owe each of them a great deal and it would be wrong not to publicly thank them this evening for their faithful service to and for this parish over the past year.

I want to say on behalf of the Select Vestry and parishioners a special word of thanks to Mr Drew Buchanan. Drew was co-opted on to the Select Vestry, as per the constitution of the Church of Ireland, to take over the role of Treasurer. I am not breaking a confidence by saying this, but it was for me one of those God-moments in the prayer room when I asked him to take on this task and he agreed. He has worked tirelessly to sort out our accounts and to get us back on the right path – you will hear in a few moments where we are presently and of some of the challenges ahead for us as a parish fellowship. I want to thank Drew for the unseen work of meeting with bank officials, with the diocesan staff, with the auditor and those who worked tirelessly with him to sort out the Gift Aid so that we could put ourselves back on the right path again financially. Thank you Drew. I know from the many hours we have spent together that you have done this work out of a desire for God's glory and for the blessing of His people here at Holy Trinity.

I want to turn away now from the financial situation of this parish because that is not the heart of this parish and it is not the heart of the work that goes on here. I want to thank you all as a congregation this evening. Without you this parish would not exist and this fellowship would not exist. Without you the work of God would not be done and without you the kingdom of God would not be extended in the lives of many in this community. Thank you for being the people of God. I want to say thank you to you all as a people for your generosity of giving of your time, of your finances and of your abilities in serving Christ in this place and beyond in this community. Thank you for your prayers week by week for this parish, for its people and for the leaders of all the organisations.

It is to the leaders that I want to turn our attention for a few moments:

GB – it has been a year of transition for our GB Company as we said good bye to Mrs Irene Moffett after 20 years of faithful service here at Holy Trinity. It was right and fitting that at our enrolment service in October 2012 the Select Vestry on behalf of the parish marked her retirement with a gift. I want to thank Mrs Sandra Montgomery for taking on the office of Captain and for serving Christ in that role. I know Sandra has brought new ideas and a new way of working already to the company and it continues to thrive under her leadership and guidance. Please continue to remember in prayer Sandra, the officers, helpers and girls as they continue to seek, serve and follow Christ.

BB – I want to thank Drew, his officers, and helpers for all their work on a Monday evening with the boys of our BB Company. One of the significant changes that we have noticed with our BB Company over the past 20 years is that the proportion of boys who have no church connection other than through the BB has steadily risen. It is important that we see the BB and GB as a means of evangelism and as a mission organisation within our church and not just simply as a youth organisation. I know, from being present each Monday evening, of the time and effort that is put in to creating a varied programme in order to maintain the interest of the boys and to develop them into men of God.

Youth Club – Friday evenings continues to prove a popular organisation with many non-church young people. I want to thank Maurice and his leaders for their work amongst the young people each week. I know that this youth

organisation would greatly value not only your prayers but also if you could give of your time to come along and help, even if it was only one evening a month.

Potter's House and J Club – thank you to Victoria and the teacher's of Potter's House and to all who help Janice with the monthly J Club. I have said it often from this lectern – we give our children the greatest gift when we teach them the Word of God. As a father I appreciate greatly all that Taylor has learnt in Potter's House and J Club over the years. Thank you for your faithful teaching week by week. We often take it for granted and that should not be the case. Personally I admire your ability to teach children as I find myself struggling to prepare a monthly children's address.

SEED – I want to thank Ryan, Amy, Ashton for their work each Sunday evening with our young people in the Youth Fellowship. I think it is fair to say that to many of the young people in this church look up to them – and that is a good thing. I want to thank them for setting a godly example to them, for being more than just Sunday evening leaders with them and for continually encouraging the young people to be all out for Jesus.

Thank you also to those who lead the new discipleship groups on the third Sunday evening of the month – where the bible teaching is more age appropriate and tailored to meet the inquiring minds of our young people.

To all our adult organisations, I don't propose to go through the list but thank you to all who take time to organise programmes, plan bible studies, make their homes available and lead others in fellowship groups, recreational activities and spiritual development. Please be assured of our continued prayers for you and for all that you do in serving Christ in this way.

Prayer Team – thank you for your prayers each Thursday evening and especially on a Sunday morning. I think it is significant that in the past year we have seen more and more people coming forward for prayer each week after morning service. This is a vital ministry of our church and one that I personally value and appreciate. I know many more value the prayers and the confidentiality of the group. Please continue to pray for us as we will for you.

Choir – thank you to the members of the choir who week by week lead us in worship. Thank you also for your grace in welcoming more people to enter the choir for special occasions. I want to say to you I think that is a sign of great maturity and of Christian grace that you do not see the choir as your little kingdom but primarily to lead the people of God in singing the praise of God. When I speak with other clergy they are surprised that as a choir you embrace such things so readily. Thank you for that grace and thank you for leading us in the praise of God. Thank you Janet, though she will kill me for mentioning her publicly, for overseeing the choir practices and for playing the organ, especially at services of HC.

Praise Band – thank you to the praise band and to the many other, especially younger, musicians who have led us in praise over the past year. I know the

commitment level that is required each week to rehearse and to learn new material to help us continue to be fresh and alive in worship. We are blessed to have such gifted people in our fellowship.

Thank you to David for organising the laptop each week and for putting up with all the last minute changes that the rector makes, and sometimes suggests in the middle of a service. Thank you also to John Fittis and all who operate the sound desk each week. Most of all thank you for turning off the mic when I forget and start singing. That is a blessing for us all.

Louise - I want to say thank you to Louise for co-ordinating all the music for worship at Holy Trinity. Thank you for taking time to develop and encourage our young people in leading worship. Thank you for bringing a blend and balance of old and new music for us to worship God each week. I know we would be poorer in our worship without your work in organising, choosing and developing the musical offerings of praise each week.

Garry Richmond and Vic Wootton – thank you to the two wardens for all their work each week in preparing things for worship. For all the practical little things that go unnoticed by many, but not by the rector and more importantly not by God. Their quiet, efficient manner has ensured dignity, respect and the worship of God taking place with reverence and order, as it should be.

Glebe wardens - Thank you for your work in the practical upkeep of the buildings and especially in some of the ongoing work of the maintenance of the rectory.

I want to thank Maurice Langley, who for many years compiled and printed the parish magazine. This work went on month by month in the background. Maurice stepped down in September 2012 and I thank Mark Edgar for taking up the reins and producing the monthly magazine since then.

Shirley Moffett – thank you for cleaning this large building week by week. An onerous task but one I know that has always been done to the highest of standards and I know that such work flows from a personal faith in Christ and for His glory here.

Anne Calvert – and all who serve on the tea/coffee rota on a Sunday morning. Thank you as I know many people really appreciate this opportunity to fellowship after morning worship week by week. Can I encourage you to volunteer to help with this rota so that the workload is shared evenly.

Chair rota, welcoming rota – thank you to all who do the practical tasks of putting out chairs, handing out prayer books and bibles, greeting people week by week. Such practical service is vital if we are to worship God. Thank you for serving Christ by serving us in this way.

Colin McIlwaine – I want to thank Colin for organising the readers and those who lead us in the intercessory prayers each week. It makes my life a lot easier not to have to do this and it means that worship truly is a corporate reality. Added to which it is important that people are given the opportunity to serve God and to lead worship in this way each week as we meet as the people of

God. I know Colin would be delighted if you come and put your name forward to read a lesson or to lead in prayers some Sunday.

Hazel and Sandra – thank you for the flowers each week and especially at Harvest time. The floral decorations brighten the sanctuary and reflect the beauty of God's creation.

Jack Blair – I want to thank Jack for his faithful service each week here at Holy Trinity. I thank him personally for his words of encouragement, for his listening ear and for going beyond what many other lay readers do. Not only does Jack lead worship with humility, reverence and dignity but it very apparent that it is out of a love for Christ that he serves. I know many of you appreciate his preaching, his prayers and I know that many of you at times of need have turned to him for pastoral care and support. I thank him for taking on such tasks without seeking any praise or honour except knowing that in doing so he is serving Christ. Jack has always been a voice of reason and common sense when I have turned to him for advice or counsel. Thank you.

I want to turn in closing to the life of this parish again. We have been going through the Tear Fund Discovery process – I know it has seemed like it has been going on a long time but it is not something to be raced through and forgotten. We are entering the final phase of that. We are now looking at the information provided by the Census of 2011 and also from a survey carried out amongst parishioners and the wider community. I want to say thank you to Bert, Alison and Fiona who have carried this forward for us over the past year.

It has been challenging and we have learned much – not least that we do an amazing amount of work in this community as a parish and as individual parishioners. I look forward to the next steps in this process and to seeing where God is calling us to serve Him afresh in this community.

This June I will be ordained 20 years, 17 of those years have been spent here at Holy Trinity. It is an immense privilege to be your rector and it is something that I do not take for granted. I am only too well aware of my own failings and frailties as I seek to serve Christ and follow His call to ordained ministry. Thank you for your grace and forgiveness when I have failed to be the pastoral support that you needed. I trust and pray that after such a long time here you know that I genuinely love you as a people and that I am passionate about serving Christ and seeing you follow Christ faithfully. There are many challenges in ministry but I know of no other vocation which would thrill my heart and drive my life as serving Christ in the ordained ministry.

I would say to you all that I can foresee a time of great turmoil ahead for the Church of Ireland, not least in the whole area of Human Sexuality. The government have pushed ahead with same-sex marriage, which goes against all that Scripture teaches and against the Created order of Almighty God. I want to state again publicly, so that no one is under any false or mistaken understandings – everyone is welcome at Holy Trinity. Everyone will be welcomed, respected and loved as someone for whom Christ Jesus died and rose again. We will seek to the best of our ability to love as Christ loved and to see people with the eyes of Christ. However, that is not to say that all behaviour, lifestyle choices or teaching will be accepted and condoned. As your rector I have sought at all times to uphold the teaching of the Word of

God in all areas of my own life and the life of this church fellowship. On occasions taking such a stand has cost me personally – in terms of friendships, in terms of standing with the wider church and community. There have been times when my standing for what Scripture teaches has affected how members of this congregation have viewed and spoken to me. For those occasions when how I said something hurt people I again ask your forgiveness. It has never been my intention to hurt, offend or alienate anyone. Yet, I would say to you all please do not ask me to compromise the Word of God. Please do not ask me to turn a blind eye to things which Scripture teaches as sinful. Please do not ask me to remain silent or to accept what Scripture teaches against. I have committed my life to follow Christ and it is to Him I will answer for my ministry amongst you. It is my desire, my prayerful hope, to serve you faithfully by being faithful to Christ and to God's Word. I pray that is your desire also, not just for me, but for yourself and your family as well.

I thank Janet and Taylor for their constant love and support, even when Dad is tired and grumpy. Thank you for loving us as a family and for making this a safe place and a godly place in which our daughter is growing up.

Lastly, I thank almighty God for His love, His grace and His mercy which as Lamentations says are new every morning.

Amen.