

September 2016

Being Known as the Repairers of Broken Walls

A Pastoral Letter

Dear St Alban's family,

I want to thank everyone for the resilience, understanding, honesty, commitment and trust that has characterised our life together in these preceding weeks. With our initial transition behind us, we now begin a season of living and learning together afresh as we settle into and explore our life of community, worship and mission in this exceptional and temporary season.

I believe that it is helpful for us to look more closely at the verses from Isaiah 58 that were spoken over us in our service of transition. I want to use those verses to draw out a horizon of hope that informs the choices we make about our character and commitments today.

*Then you will call, and the LORD will answer;
you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I.*

It is God who builds the Church not humans. The journey of discernment, building and provision is a journey that we undertake in humble reliance upon God. At each step we ask ourselves, "what is God's Spirit saying to the church?" We must call upon God in prayer and be awake in our spiritual insights to hear God's return call to us. We do not rely on our own strengths and capacity alone. None of us can assume to know the mind of God.

*If you do away with the yoke of oppression,
with the pointing finger and malicious talk,*

This season is a time when there will be more to criticise and more to complain about that probably ever before in our lives together. We must very seriously take to heart the warnings found in the book of James about the use of our tongues. Using our imagination, if we jump forward to the day when we have our celebration service of return to our church site, and imagine ourselves on that day, the difference between whether we are a people built up and vibrant or worn down and weary will directly correlate with how we have chosen to use our tongues in this intervening time. There will be more opportunities to "point the finger" in blame, criticism and frustration than we have ever known before. **It is a choice to believe the best and speak the best about each other and to each other.** It is a mark of our maturity in Christ that we are able to do so. If our conversations in the Four Square, library and coffee time are filled with *malicious talk* we will be doing more damage to God's church than unreinforced concrete in a big earthquake. Each one of us has an important part to play in creating, living and safeguarding a culture and community of love, trust, honesty and understanding. Nourishing and life-giving community is the gift that we offer others in our community who do not yet belong to our Church family. The call to create and sustain that gift has never been more important and the opportunity to share it has never, perhaps, been more possible.

In regard to the verses about oppression: Jesus often spoke about the religious and political oppressions that had been put upon and overburdened God's people. This is a season of holding things lightly. This season must be characterised by open and genuine partnership between us all. There is no agenda, hidden or otherwise. We are all people whom God wishes to be **free to worship without fear** (as Zachariah prophesied at the news of John the Baptists birth). It is good for us to be honest with each other about changes that make it harder for us to experience the freedom of worshipping God and also share the experiences that release that freedom for ourselves or others. Ultimately we must remember that this season is temporary and we must direct our energies into the decision-making and rebuilding process above and beyond this immediate season of transition. **A church on the move has to travel lightly.**

*and if you spend yourselves on behalf of the hungry
and satisfy the needs of the oppressed,*

Our challenges are First World challenges. We must not let our own discomfort and needs replace a commitment and concern for the needs of others in this world. I am so thankful for the timing of our Mission Fair, Bible Month and Wellington City Mission Brown Paper Bag Appeal, in which we have lifted our eyes beyond ourselves in these preceding weeks. As an old Rotarian I share their motto with you, **service above self**, which always strikes me as particularly appropriate for our life as Christians.

*Then your light will rise in the darkness,
and your night will become like the noonday.*

*The LORD will guide you always;
he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land
and will strengthen your frame.*

*You will be like a well-watered garden,
like a spring whose waters never fail.*

*Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins
and will raise up the age-old foundations;
you will be called Repairer of Broken Walls,
Restorer of Streets with Dwellings.*

Don't skip over the first word of the above scripture: "*then*". Choosing to live in the ways described above have a **direct consequence on the degree of Divine healing** that will be accomplished within us, between us and through us.

In Christ,

Reverend Canon Dr Eleanor Sanderson