



Devonport Anglican Church

Priest-in-charge Annual Report to Devonport Parish 2020.

What a crazy, mixed-up year – and more – we have had!

As a Parish family, together we have faced fire, pandemic, disjointed ministry from me, and much more. And through it all, the Lord has continued to bless and sustain us, even through some very challenging times. I did not even produce an Annual Report last year, as I was off on sick-leave.

This time, I want to give a fairly brief report that has a bit of a backward-look, but then focuses mostly on the future.

As we returned from Long-service Leave in July last year, we were met with the fire at St. Paul's. At the time I commented that, I wondered whether we could be back in by Christmas. Well, I did not say *which* Christmas! Much time has been spent in dealing with insurers, builders, getting quotes, and urging the relevant people to keep things moving. We *are* seeing progress, and will – hopefully – be back in by this *coming* Christmas!

The last year has also seen the sale of the vacant block of land next to St. Olave's, the sorting and sign-off of St. O's cemetery records, and the imminent transfer of ownership of St. Olave's to the local Chapter of the God Squad, the Christian Motorcycle Club. Part of that transfer will also include the sale of another portion of the remaining land around the church to the purchasers of the other vacant block of land. All good results, I think.

As we arrived back from our leave last year, not only were we met with the fire, but my health went into serious decline. It was a difficult and frustrating time for all involved, and none more so than for my Parish family. I thank you all for your love and concern – and for your patience. There were many upheavals, disjointedness, and people needing to shoulder extra responsibilities. Thanks to Dane, our Parish Consultant, who oversaw the provision of *locum* ministry. Thanks to all the *locums* who came and helped out. Thanks to Helen, for all the extra administrative burdens you took on, and to the Committee of Management who worked with Dane to oversee everything. And especially thank you to Shirley, Peter, and Kimberley for your loving care and concern during long times of uncertainty, and slow recovery. I'm not back to *full* health yet, but I am close!

And then, we hit the first global Pandemic in around 100 years!

Coronavirus has knocked everyone – including the Churches – for a six. And our Parish is one of them. At a moment's notice, we have had to pivot how we do things, with Services online (and from home!), meetings on Zoom, deliveries of Parish materials via email and hand-deliveries, people phoning around others on behalf of the Parish, new cleaning and disinfecting and seating regimes..... and so the list goes on! COVID-19 has certainly kept us all learning new things. But,

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praise the Lord, with His help and the presence of His Spirit, we have managed. And in some respects, we have *flourished*, as people have grown in their expression of Christian love one for another, and been living lives of confidence and trust in the Lord, in the face of what are very uncertain times, from a worldly point of view. We have made mistakes, and we have learned much along the way, but the Lord continues to walk with us, and *guide* us on that way. We continue to pray for our world, for our families, and for our neighbours. And we continue to ask the Lord to guide us as we learn new things. These have been – and continue to be – very challenging times, and we can't always see clearly the way ahead, but we know the One who knows the future.

And so, I turn to consider the future.....

Soon after we returned from leave last year, and before my time off sick, I met with Bishop Richard, and part of our discussion was about the future – for myself and my family, and for the Parish of Devonport. We agreed that there is much that had been done over the preceding five years in terms of healing, and bringing the Parish together. But one thing that my ministry here had not really achieved was significant numerical and financial growth. Spiritual growth, and healing and cohesion, had seen a measure of success. Growth in numbers has only been slow, and finances have continued to struggle.

When I first came to Devonport, we were drawing on financial reserves to cover the costs of ministry. Six and a bit years down the track have seen a *little* improvement, but not enough for present patterns to be sustainable. In discussion with Bishop Richard, we both concluded that perhaps I had achieved what *I* could, and it needed a different person, with different skills, to bring on future stages of life in the Parish. I told him that I thought a younger Minister with a young family was needed, and Bishop Richard spoke of it needing someone with 'entrepreneurial' rather than my more 'pastoral' skills. The main issue is that such change would need to be made while there were still enough financial reserves to seed-fund the employment of such a person.

We spoke of what *my* plans for the future would be if I were to step aside, and I didn't have much in mind at that time. And then I got sick!

Sadly, I needed extended time on sick leave, when I was not actively able to consider other ministry options. And then as I was recovering, the COVID-19 Pandemic hit, making it difficult timing for the Parish to be faced with losing an active Minister. However, for as long as I remain, financial reserves continue to dwindle, making it increasingly difficult to fund something new. The Tongue family have been very happy and 'comfortable' here in Devonport, and I *had* always hoped to retire from here – still a few years off yet. But the longer I stay, the more uncertain future ministry options for the Parish become. And so, it is with a sad heart that I announce that I will be resigning from Ministry here in Devonport Parish, effective from around the end of the year (a final date still to be confirmed).

This is a longer period of notice than would normally be the case, for a couple of main reasons. First, with the Pandemic still raging, and the 'operations' of the church still sorely impacted, it gives some time to work out in what way things

might be able to continue to function once we leave. And secondly, it means there may be time to start the ball rolling in considering what comes next for the Parish, rather than having to wait until after we have left to begin that process. I would also like to be able to see the restoration of St. Paul's through to completion. There will clearly be some things that I am *not* able to bring to conclusion but that would always be the case. I hope to be here to help the Parish through our Christmas Celebrations. And so I anticipate my resignation would take effect from around the end of the year, or early into the new year, but as I say, that is still to be confirmed.

There is never a "good" time to leave a Parish. There are still Redress issues pending, there is the Pandemic and how to manage Services and activities during that, and so on. But staying on just exacerbates the financial issues, and limits future possibilities. We could have stayed on another three or four years – and then the reserves would be exhausted, the needs for different ministry gifts would not have been met, and there would not be anything left with which to fund anything new.

And what is in store for *my* future ministry, and for life for the Tongue family? I have investigated a number of options, both here in Tasmania, and interstate. Out of all of that, what seemed to be the best 'fit' was for me to accept an offer to be the Associate Minister at the Holy Trinity network of parish centres, based in Launceston, working alongside our Parish Consultant, Dane Courtney. I have verbally accepted that offer, subject to a formal letter of appointment. And lest anyone jump to the conclusion that he has "poached" me..... Dane, as our Consultant, is very aware of the needs of the Parish here, both financially, and ministry-wise. He agrees with other assessments already mentioned about what would seem best for Devonport Parish. Holy Trinity has been looking for an Assistant Minister for some time, and when Dane heard that I was considering moving aside to allow for something new here, he thought that me going to minister with him could work to the best for all concerned.

This will mean considerable readjustments for me and my family, for Dane adjusting to working alongside me(!), and for the Family of Devonport Anglican Church, but as Paul wrote to the Philippians, "I am sure....that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Christ Jesus." (Phil 1:6). May that good work continue to happen in all our lives and ministries, to His glory!

I am sure there will be many questions, both immediately, and over coming weeks and months. I am sorry to have made the announcement in *this* way. I would have preferred to make it in person, at an Annual Report-back meeting, but the Pandemic has made holding such meetings very difficult. I will try to field questions for people – if, indeed, I have any answers to particular questions – in person, via phone, email, or other contact methods. There are many things that we will not have an answer for, but will either have to work out together, or trust in the Lord to show us the way, and lead us through. As I said before, like so much else that has happened this year, we may not know the future, but we know the One who does. In Him we make our way forward in trust.