

St. Mary & St. Bartholomew's Church

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To my dear friends of the Church of the Cross,

I want to assure you that you are all in our thoughts and prayers tonight as you celebrate another of year of God's abundant blessing on your ministry.

I have many fond memories of being present with you this time last year and was humbled by the ways in which God had lavished you with His grace. I can only imagine what he has done amongst you since then. I very much appreciate Father Chuck's kind invitation to be with you tonight, however, circumstances have not permitted me to accept.

I want to say how blessed our Canadian team was in our visit to you last February. Your kind hospitality was, again, appreciated immensely. Thank you to all our gracious hosts who made us feel so welcome. You have become for us, "home away from home."

As a result of that visit our parish vision for ministry east Saint John was both confirmed and broadened. With your support, preliminary study has been completed in our hope of purchasing of a parcel of vacant land adjacent to our church facility. Following the acquisition of the land, our vision is to expand our worship space, making it more suitable for contemporary worship and, to create a multipurpose community ministry center as we strive to reach out with the Gospel to many in need in our neighborhood. Please pray with us that our vision would become a reality.

This past year, we have witnessed the Lord at work in a number of our ministries for which we give thanks. Last October a second priest, "The younger guy" joined our staff. Pastor Paul (Ranson) brings many gifts to our ministry, especially his ability to communicate the Gospel to our youth. We are already beginning to see some of the fruit of his labors.

Besides our youth ministry, God has richly blessed us with Stephen Ministry. Our first group of Stephen Ministers have been trained and commissioned this past year and they are engaged in wonderful ministry. We look forward to training our second wave of ministers in the near future. Janet Williston, our Stephen Ministry Leader, sent for her training by the Church of the Cross, has done a fabulous job in equipping the saints. Thanks be to God.

However, the blessings that we have experienced this past year have not come without a fair share of pain. In my 27 years of ordained ministry never before had I experienced a greater testing than this past year. It all came to a head with the sudden departure of our Music Director, a key player in our new direction of contemporary worship. For a time, momentum was lost. The fallout of that incident was significant. As a result, I think I have gained a deeper understanding of the words of Scripture from 1 Peter 1:6-7

In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

We have come through the refiners fire and, by the grace of God, I think we are stronger for it. Having refocused on our vision, and incorporating three new music leaders into our weekly Services, our strategy of offering different styles of worship is back on track and momentum is being regained. Again, thanks be to God.

I want to personally thank Fr. Chuck, for his timely visit to us last October - for his teaching, his encouragement and, of course, his friendship during our low time. I want to say that we were also very blessed to have Fr. Chuck's "forerunner" with us last summer. Elisabeth Markle did an outstanding job in conducting a training workshop for Sunday school teachers and Youth Leaders. We continue to reap the fruit of her visit. We remember Elisabeth in our prayers and especially her father in his time of illness.

All in all, 2013 was a good year for us. As we look ahead to the remainder of 2014, I pray that the gracious work that the Lord has been doing in our particular corners of His vineyard - in Canada, in South Carolina and in Ireland, would expand in profound ways as we claim our common ground, the Rock of our salvation, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and, His Kingdom.

May God bless you all my dear friends.

Yours under the mercy of Christ,

Greg McMullin