

Dear Friends: For those who do not know me My name is Bishop Larry Robertson, a so-called retired Bishop of the Diocese of Yukon and the Arctic, now acting as Priest in Charge of the Trinity of Parishes in the Diocese of Athabasca. Trinity of Parishes is a joining of 3 parishes (All Saints Athabasca, St. Andrew, Lac La Biche and Northern Lights, a parish of 4 congregations). We have come together for the purpose of support, ministry and leadership. I work with a ministry team consisting of Rev. Rose Howell, Rev Deacon Bill Creaser, 2 retired priests and 8 lay readers. Together we grow, learn and minister to the people of our various communities.

To say that 2020 was an unusual year would be an understatement. Many of us in our parish has felt the devastating effects of the Corona Virus, Loss of Jobs, Disruption of family relationships, family violence and death are all too close to many of us. The same could be said for many throughout this country and the world.

One man who was unemployed trying to find work, that was not there, so he could feed his family ask me, "everything is gone, is there anything I can depend on?"

This took me back to a time when I was the priest of the Anglican Church in Baker Lake, Nunavut. The winter that year was the worst I have ever experienced. It seemed that December was one big blizzard. We lived on the edge of the town by the Church. Our living room at one end of the house looked out at the Lake. The Storm was so consistent and strong that the snow had cover our living room and was halfway up the second story bedroom windows. The only time I left the house was to get groceries and to attend the bedside of a dying elder. Services were cancelled and Christmas looked bleak. My Lay Readers went ahead and planned Christmas Eve saying you can't stop Christmas. We knew as long as the storm raged on there would be no service.

Out of the blue, against the weather forecast, the storm subsided 8 o'clock Christmas Eve. In the mysterious way of Inuit people, the word went out. !030 pm people started coming to church. Elders first then the rest. The church could comfortably sit 150 people. Over 300 showed up. Literally wall to wall people.

The service started in silence and Darkness. Then the Christ Candle was lit with the simple words “the light of Christ given for you. With the same words in English and Inuktitut the light was passed from person to person until 300 candles were lit and we sang “Silent Night by candlelight. Then every light in the place went on showing the tree that most never thought would be lit. One of the Elders leaned close to me and with a big grin said in broken English “can’t stop Christmas”

Can’t stop Christmas. That phrase has been going over and over in my mind these last few days. This pandemic can do its best but it can’t stop Christmas. I hear on the TV that there is a court hearing accusing the Government of Cancelling Christmas. To my embarrassment it is led by the Churches. I want to tell them “You can’t stop Christmas” It is coming and nothing can stop it.

You see Christmas does not require Government permission, it doesn’t require Church services, it doesn’t require parties, food or drink. It doesn’t even require family although all those will be sorely missed this Christmas.

Christmas is an event that comes from the heart. It comes from a desire to remember the great act of love that our Creator showed to us in sending his only Son Jesus into the world to reveal his love, His healing power, His saving grace to a people so desperately in need of these things. We are that people.

So, Christmas will happen. Some will gather virtually, some will worship alone or in small groups, some will cry, some will laugh, some will sing, some will be silent. But all will experience the love of the Christ Child. This experience is not depending on our feelings but upon our faith. In faith we encounter the grace of God as he comes into our lives in a way that can bring healing, peace. In a way that can meet our needs. We need only be receptive.

You can’t stop Christmas. It is coming. May we open our hearts to receive God’s healing grace. Allow the Christ Child to bring us his peace in the midst of the chaos that seems to surround us. On this you can depend.

On behalf of my wife Sheila and I we want to wish you and very blessed and safe Christmas. Know you are not alone and know “YOU CAN’T STOP CHRISTMAS.” Merry Christmas my friends.