St Francis Regional Ministry sees crowd at first combined Christmas

By Matthew Townsend
Communications Missioner

Anglicans from Eastern Townships churches packed into St. George’s, Lennoxville, on Dec. 22, 2019, for a combined Christmas service—a first in a deanery that has been growing in regional identity but has yet to celebrate a Christmas liturgy under the same roof. To outside observers, though, the gathering of the St Francis Regional Ministry might have looked more like a single church family coming together for Christmas.

“We’ve had other deanery services, but this is the first Christmas one we’ve had of Lessons and Carols,” Ruth Sheeran, rural dean for the Deanery of St Francis, told the Gazette at a lunch held after worship. The deanery comprises more than 20 churches in the Townships, most of which are affiliated with the St Francis Regional Ministry.

Sheeran explained that the service, which Bishop Bruce Myers also attended, reflected recent years’ efforts to help individual parishes grow into a regional ministry with shared clergy, events, and missions. “Before we had the regional ministry, each little church was…congregational minded. There wasn’t a feeling that we were all part of one thing. Bringing everyone together, people really get the idea that they are part of something.”

“That has really been growing over the years. I think this shows, because so many people came, that they really do feel part of something bigger.”

The service saw a few other novel elements. For example, the lunch was made by a local caterer and purchased with discretionary funds.

“This is something we’re trying out as an experiment,” Simonton told the group that this work wasn’t merely a matter of maintaining churches. “The vision of the leadership is coming from the people—we meet in vestries, we meet in regional ministry meetings, when we meet at deanery council,” he said.

In an interview with the Gazette, Simonton said the work of the regional ministry stems from the fact that the “medieval, Christendom parish model—we talked about this at Synod, as well—is gone. Even though other people don’t realize it’s gone yet, it’s gone. You can’t have one priest, one parish anymore,” he said. “We’re not really running as parishes anymore…we run as a team. What’s more difficult is to get everybody together.”

In the past, there used to be fifth-Sunday services to bring people together, but lately the St Francis Regional Ministry has moved to special events: Celtic evensongs, jazz vespers, barbecues, and a yuletide party. “We’re trying different things that will get as many people we can to come in” and to thank them for their work.

Simonton noted that other local churches advertised Christmas services as individual congregations. The regional ministry advertises as one group, though. “We’re keeping all the parishes open, but…those parishes are certain things about what we’ve done here which are substantively different. It only works because there are so many people involved with leadership here.

“It’s not just worship. We have honourary assistants. We have deenary lay readers. We have parish lay readers. We have pastoral visitors that go and take the sacrament into people who are housebound and into six different care homes. We have people who are running parishes, running events in the parishes.”

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Simonton noted that other local churches advertised Christmas services as individual congregations. The regional ministry advertises as one group, though. “We’re keeping all the parishes open, but...the way those parishes survive is in combination with everyone else.” This combination is administrative, but it’s also social. If the showing on Dec. 22 is any indication—with the parking lot, pews, and lunch tables seemingly filled to capacity—the regional ministry may be gaining traction in its social efforts. The day’s success might also owe some thanks to the weather: free of snow with a bit of sunshine. From Sheeran’s perspective, though, coming together is pretty natural in the Eastern Townships.

“We do all like coming together like this.”

“The people involved with leadership here...”

“Les gens sont prêts à aller de l’avant avec tout ce que l’aidereservé. Je pense qu’il y a un désir simulatadido d’honorer le passé et ce que nous avons maintenant, d’être les intercéducteurs de notre héritage du mieux que nous le pouvons», a précisé Mgr Myers.

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Pour en savoir plus: bit.ly/2t4eHcC

Noël en différé, à 20 000 kilomètres de la maison!

Les marins étrangers de deux vraquiers spécialisés dans le transport du cement ont en l’heureuse surprise de recevoir des cadeaux de Noël de Gaspésiens au cours des derniers jours, une initiative de paroissiens et du pasteur Joshua Petueblo, de l’Eglise anglicane de Port-Daniel, Shigawake et New Carlisle.

Pour en savoir plus: bit.ly/2NmJxcr

SNAPSHOTS: Images from Christmas celebrations in the Diocese of Quebec can be found on page 3.
Communication

Greetings to all, in the name of our Lord, Jesus Christ! The Gazette’s production schedule dictates that we assemble the February issue within Christmas time. In order to afford Bishop Bruce Myers some measure of vacation during the holidays, we decided that we would provide an editorial for this issue in place of his episcopal column. Bishop Bruce, of course, will return soon.

As some of you may know, my spouse and I live in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia—and my other job (editor of the Anglican Journal) often brings me to Toronto. My travel between the two cities tends to put me over Quebec, but not in it.

Part of our approach to our remote service to the diocese has been ensuring that I do spend time in Quebec. I was blessed to attend all of Synod in November, and Kate and I both came to Quebec in the spring so that I could present a communications plan (and myself) to the Diocesan Executive Council. This didn’t feel like enough—and didn’t bring me to any parishes. Thus, when discussing our Christmas plans, Kate and I decided to come to Quebec. We rented a car in Halifax and arrived on December 18, graciously received in Lévis by Sean Otto (our diocesan registrar) and family. We left Quebec on New Year’s Eve.

In between, we were able to attend services for the first time in the Eastern Townships (where we were likewise hosted by the Rev. Canon Giuseppe Gagliano). I was able to participate in the Rev. Thomas Ntilivamunda’s nascent intercultural ministry; to attend a caroling service at St. Michael’s in Sillery; and to celebrate the birth of Christ during midnight mass at the cathedral. We hoped to venture into the Gaspé, but the weather soured. Erring on the side of prudence, we decided to return home.

This may sound a bit like a travelogue, and I suppose it is—but I hope it also speaks to my role to be a communicating ministry. For some, this might mean providing a helping hand: collaborating on a website, helping to format brochures, and other tasks that may seem out of reach. For others, it may mean a helping hand: collaborating on a website, helping to format brochures, and other tasks that may seem out of reach. For others, it may mean a helping hand: collaborating on a website, helping to format brochures, and other tasks that may seem out of reach. For others, it may mean a helping hand: collaborating on a website, helping to format brochures, and other tasks that may seem out of reach.
A Festival of Lessons and Carols brought Anglicans from around the Deanery of St Francis to a single Christmas service in Lennoxville on Dec. 22 (see page 1). The gathering, which included Bishop Bruce Myers, featured choral and instrumental accompaniment to familiar carols (Photos 1-7). Afterward, a locally catered lunch gave parishioners a chance to break bread, converse, and be thanked for their work in the past year (Photos 8-9). Those who contributed to the life of the St Francis Regional Ministry were presented with icons by the Ven. Dr. Edward Simonton OGS and the Rev. Canon Giuseppe Gagliano—and one young visitor was even able to choose an icon as an early Christmas gift (Photo 10).

Christmas Eve at Holy Trinity Cathedral saw a significant gathering of people come to the 11 p.m. service, which included a candlelight hymn (Photos 11-13). The crowd was large enough that some worshippers sat in the cathedral’s balcony. At the Dec. 20 Church House Staff Lunch (Photo 14), staff members each received a small gift in appreciation of their service to the diocese. Bishop Bruce was given a houseplant that would be “difficult to kill,” essential for a busy travel schedule. The bishop spent Christmas on the Lower North Shore, visiting Anglican communities there—including St. Peter, Old Fort (Photo 15, Bruce Myers photo).
Offensive hope in heavy traffic

By Louisa Blair
Columnist

O ur society is now full of prophets who preach guilt and punishment for the sin of climate change. We don’t have to go near a church to hear them. Like Israel in the Old Testament, we are told that if we are collectively guilty, we are being collectively punished, and we must collectively reform. There is plenty of preaching about in- dividual guilt too, about what (if and) I drive (fuel = pol- lution), what I eat (steak = pollution), what clothes I wear (all synthetics = plastic, plastic = pollution), and how I va- cate (fly = pollution). However much we have tried to recover from the church’s discourse on guilt and teach ourselves self-esteem, we are clearly guilty as charged, col- lectively and individually. We have worshipped the idols of materialism and we are destroying the planet. And to atone for our planetary sins, our idol worship, we need to be fierce stewards and political activists. We need to make personal sacrifices. But we also need hope.

What if none of these can fix the planet, what if it’s too late? Then we need hope even more. What does hope look like, if there’s no hope? As the great cellist Pablo Casals once said, in two apparently contradictory statements, “The situation is hopeless. We must take the next step.”

When there’s no hope in sight, we have to be hopeful.

And as my sister observed one night as we watched the Quebec cyclists get thrashed by the Gatineau 100 pictures, hope has to play offensively and not just defensively.

So last year, when winter arrived, I started playing of- fensively. I took up winter biking. Many people told me it was cold, dangerous, and foolish. So I offensively went down to the nearest thrift store, bought a selo de guerre for $40, kitted it out with sturdy mud guards and studded tyres, and off I went.

But offensive hope is not typically safe. As the city does not clear the bike paths, I now share the road with other guilty planet-dwellers driving trucks and pick-ups (of- fensive hope means there is no button for the anti-freeze. I’ve also yet to find a way to keep my hands warm and still manage the brakes and gears. Offensive hope is also typically blind: I am often riding in the dark. To get home from work before night- fall would mean taking the afternoon off. So I bought a luminous vest that flashes like a merry-go-round. I can now be seen from outer space.

Offensive hope teaches one to slow down and be pa- tient, as small children do. It takes forever to dress up in my gear and then to undress at the other end. And

GLEANINGS

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Diocesan Historian

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