

“I want to challenge you to grow your own parish by two per cent a year. That is modest, and it’s achievable, sustainable and measurable. For congregations of 50 worshipping people, that’s one new person. Could you do that? Could you invite somebody to ‘come and see?’”

— Bishop Colin Johnson in his charge to synod in May, 2007

‘Radical welcome’ leads to growth

Congregation willing to try new ideas

BY NANCY DEVINE

In the heart of the old town of Markham, Grace Church’s front wall features a colourful art installation. It is a patchwork quilt of tiles, each one created by the church’s parishioners. It is a reminder that all are welcome, and that the congregation is richly diverse and united in the church. There is also a lot of room left for new tiles.

The Rev. Canon John Read, incumbent, and his wife, Janet, came to the parish four years ago with a mandate for growth from the parish selection committee.

“We had been at St. John’s in Port Hope and we loved it dearly,” says Canon Read. “The thing that enticed us to come here was that the parish had a strong desire to grow, and that was the challenge.”

Markham, just north of Toronto, is a town on the verge of becoming a small city, with a population of more than 200,000. It’s projected that in the next three years, 281,000 people will be calling Markham home.

The parishioners of Grace Church are planning for some of them to find a spiritual home at their church. Worship is a lively, music-infused experience that includes projection screens and PowerPoint presentations. There is a clear connection between the congregation and the leadership, and the welcome is both intentional and warm.

“We practice radical welcome



Children, teenagers and adults sing at the Sunday service at Grace Church, Markham. PHOTO BY MICHAEL HUDSON

here,” says Canon Read. “The Rule of St. Benedict is that each guest who presents themselves must be welcomed as Christ. For this reason, we meet for coffee in the lobby right after the service, and any parish meetings are a half-hour after the service. It allows us to greet newcomers and friends, and enables us to be intentional about welcome.”

Rogers Gardham, who has been a member of the congregation since 1969, says the changes have both energized and enlivened his personal experience of worship. “We leave the church

with a sense of real joy that goes out into the community. Believe me, people respond to that; they want to know why our parking lot is so full.”

Canon Read has visited St. Bartholomew’s Church in New York City to attend workshops led by the Rev. Bill Tully, a guru of church growth. In addition, Canon Read has worked with Alice Mann of the Alban Institute, who is a consultant on church growth for congregations in both Canada and the United States. He has also attended Andrew Weeks’ Magnetic Church conferences.

“All of these people have provided some insights into growth, and these principles can be applied successfully,” he says. “I have found they work, and it helps when the congregation is willing to try out new ideas.”

The church recently conducted a survey to look at how it could manage the growth that was happening, and how growth was changing the church.

Mike Clare, one the churchwardens, explained that growth can sometimes work against a church like Grace, where parking and Sunday seating can be at

a premium. “You start wondering if you should be building a new church or something, but maybe you can look at ways to better use the building you’ve got before you rush to construct something new.”

The survey indicated that while the 8:15 a.m. and 10 a.m. services were burgeoning, there was not a lot of willingness to add an 11 a.m. service.

“People had a hard time telling us this, but the fact of the matter is that 11 a.m. is just too hard for people to commit to,” said Canon Read. “People are busy — even on Sunday mornings. An 11 a.m. service is just too late for the congregation when they have activities and commitments on a Sunday afternoon.”

After some prayerful deliberation, the parish leadership decided to add a 9:30 a.m. informal worship service in the parish hall. Dubbed Eucharist in the Round, the service features upbeat contemporary music and liturgy. Attendance since last September has been steadily increasing. Eucharist in the Round will continue until after Easter. When church attendance falls off during the summer, Grace Church will return to its two services.

“The aim was to make sure that when a new person comes — even if they are just shopping around for a church, they will come in and say ‘Hey, there is a place for me here in the church and in the parking lot,’” explains Michael Clarke, who has been at Grace Church since 1985, and has stayed through all the challenges. He says that now that things are on the upswing, he appreciates his parish community even more. “There is such life here, so much diversity, so much

Continued on Page 7

Opportunities abound during March Break

March is here and spring is not far away. With March comes March Break. That is one of those good/bad scenarios for parents. March Break is a good opportunity for families to spend more time together and participate in fun activities. It is time away from homework, lessons and regularly scheduled activities. On the other hand, it's also the beginning of, "Mom, I'm bored," or the dreaded whine of, "I have nothing to do." This is where leaders in children's ministry

CHILDREN'S MINISTRY

BY LAURA WALTON-CLOUSTON

can enhance a child's March Break and welcome her or him into a warm church family.

The reality is that many parents cannot take March Break off from work. The kids may have time away from school, but not everyone can fit that into their schedule. Wouldn't it be great if your church could help

those parents who can't be home for March Break? How about a March Break Day Camp? It would be a gift to many busy parents and bored kids.

There are other opportunities for connecting with children during March Break. Church groups can go on day trips to museums, the Ontario Science Centre and art galleries. Perhaps you can go to another place of worship to learn about a different faith.

Some parishes in our diocese hold social nights during March Break. One parish is having a

Rib & Game night that includes contests for best ribs, dinner, and fun and games for all ages. The parish invites the community, so all can come and enjoy a night of good food and fellowship. This social evening can give a break to parents who are with children all day. It can also give parents who need to work time to be with their children instead of preparing dinner.

No matter what your parish does over March Break, remember that it is all about what we can do to support our kids and

young families, not about what they can do for the church. It is about outreach and sharing. The Anglican Church is at its best when we give our support to those who need us. It is just one more opportunity to share the gospel while enjoying life in our community.

Laura Walton-Clouston is the diocese's Children's Ministry Network coordinator.

Every week special

BY NANCY DEVINE

THE procession winds its way around Grace Church, Markham, as crucifer, acolytes, the choir, and the congregation bring the light of Christ into the church and reflect it to the outside world.

This is an ancient practice used in the early church to commemorate the 40 days after Jesus' birth, when he was first presented to the temple and Simeon welcomed the infant as the Messiah.

But while the procession's origins are ancient, the music and liturgy that surround it are fresh and bright, and accessible to someone who has never before celebrated Candlemas. The candles further brighten an already happy Sunday celebration.

"When the Lord Bishop of Jamaica visited us he reminded us, 'When you preach redemption you must look redeemed.' We have really taken those words to heart. We take pride in our facility and our worship space, and it has attracted new people and refreshed the congregation already here," explains Rev. Canon John Read, incumbent.

In addition to making every week a special celebration, focused on enabling people to feel they belong, Grace Church has embraced technology in its worship service to include PowerPoint presentations on a retractable overhead screen.

Technology has also improved parish communication. Parishioners can get a parish e-newsletter, and the website offers connections to not only parish groups, but also daily scripture readings and a collection of photos that illustrate a rich and varied parish life.

Canon Read credits the congregation for the growth at Grace Church. "This is a very giving congregation. They are willing to share their time, their talent and their money, and they are willing to try new things together. If something we try doesn't work out, that's okay. We will try something else."



The Rev. Canon John Read greets parishioners after the service.

PHOTOS BY MICHAEL HUDSON

Radical welcome

Continued from Page 3

energy. This is a joyful place to be."

Carol Saunders Mohammed, another churchwarden, says that change hasn't been easy. "There are those who are concerned that the church is growing too fast, but I have found that sometimes these are people who aren't willing, for whatever reason, to be part of the growth."

Adds Mr. Gardham: "Growth and the change it brings can be a frightening thing for people. That's why you need to have people leading it who are not only prepared for growth, but also know how to manage the changes. That is what has helped Grace Church grow in the way it has."



Children have fun in Sunday School.