



Diocese of Eastern Newfoundland and Labrador
THE ANGLICAN CHURCH OF CANADA

Easter 2010

My Dear Friends,

This letter began as my annual Easter letter to you. My message to you was to be a reflection on the words of St Augustine who called us an 'Easter people'. St. Augustine wasn't just saying that we are a people who define ourselves in terms of an historical event – in some way that it true – but that the resurrection is part of our life experience, part of who we are, part of what it means to be us.

It is unfortunate that during Holy Week, when we as Christians prepare to receive the risen Christ into our lives, I found myself drawn from these reflections into meetings and discussions involving lawyers, the media, and groups determined to weigh in on what was a Parish and Diocesan decision.

For that reason I feel the time has come to speak to you, the people of this Diocese. It is important for you to know the history behind the controversy surrounding the building that formerly housed the church in St. Philip's.

The consolidation or closure of churches is done for a variety of reasons. Growing areas may need larger spaces, areas experiencing decline may need fewer buildings. Many congregations experience changing needs in areas such as worship, fellowship, accessibility, children's and youth programs and technology. Many of our older buildings are not meeting the worship and fellowship needs of modern congregations. Whatever the reason, the closure of a church is always difficult, both for the congregations involved and for me personally.

This was the case with the Parish of St. Philip. Over 25 years ago, during the Incumbency of the Rev. Canon Bert Cheeseman, it was recognized that the old church was not meeting the needs of a growing community and the planning for a new church was begun.

The reasons for building a new home for the parish were many. For example, the Hall was several kilometres away on Thorburn Road, which made fellowship activities centred around worship very difficult. The building had no running water or washroom facilities, which made things difficult especially for children and the elderly. The building was in a poor state of repair; a professional estimate to repair and upgrade the building came in at approximately \$300,000.00. Thus, in 2002 at the request of the Parish, approval was given by the Administration and Finance Committee and the Diocesan Council to build a new church with several conditions; one being that the old church building be disposed of.

Of primary concern to Diocesan Council was the fact that there were a number of graves underneath the chancel area. The old church sits above, and is surrounded by, a cemetery that is over 160 years old. While this building has been deconsecrated, it is not possible to deconsecrate a cemetery unless all those buried have been moved. *This is not an option.* A cemetery is a sacred trust, and we will never allow this site to be used for a secular purpose. The only option is to remove the building from this site; either by careful demolition or with the purpose to relocate it to an alternate site. We have made this offer several times. We are willing to give the building to

the Town to move to a site of their choosing and then they may use it for whatever purpose they wish.

I should also point out that the old building that was there in 2002, when the decision to build was made, is not the original building of 1894 and, indeed, bore little resemblance to it. Over time the original arched style windows were removed and replaced with more modern rectangular windows, the wood siding was covered with vinyl siding, the old organ was replaced with a new one, and the space used for the Vestry was removed and a larger area built.

The new church was designed with respect for the past and with a view to the future. The arched window style, the steeple style and wood siding were chosen to replicate the look of the original 1894 church; the stained glass window, font, altar, steeple bell, brass oil lamps, banners, ambry and lamp, and much, much more, were brought in from the old church.

As many of you know, the decision to build a new church comes at the end of a lengthy process. The suggestion is brought to a Vestry or congregational meeting and is followed by much study and discussion. There are, over time, many Vestry and congregational meetings and if, ultimately, the congregation approves, application is made to the Diocese. The Diocese carefully reviews plans, fundraising efforts, and the financing and then must co-sign a loan application. Financial commitment is sought from individual members and parish groups to raise the funds necessary to start the project. The Parish of St. Philip went through a comprehensive and extensive process to build a new church. Permission was given in 2002, and the joyful opening service for the new Church was held on February 1, 2004.

The plan for the space where the old building stands has been in place for a number of years, but was formally approved by the congregation in 2009. If the building is removed a park like setting will be created to include space for burial of urns, two columbarium, a gazebo to be used during the annual flower service, seating areas for prayerful reflection, and a replica and memorial to the old church. What a wonderful way to honour and respect the past.

It is regretful that the media, and perhaps more particularly the Town, has chosen to show the church in such poor light. We made the decision not to debate this issue in the media or with any groups. We will continue to deal with the Town of Portugal Cove/St Philip's as they have made our business their business. We don't know what the outcome will be, but as you know most Parishes, and even the Diocese, struggle to meet everyday expenses; it is particularly disappointing that we are faced with the unexpected expense this situation has caused.

But it is time to get back to our Father's business, to spread the good news of Christ to the world.

Throughout Easter we celebrate the power, hope and joy of our Lord's resurrection and the diversity of the gifts we share as one. Let us rejoice as we celebrate this gift of new life in Christ. We are an Easter people and we have a story to tell and a song to sing. "Alleluia, Christ is risen. The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia!" *That* is our heritage.

Thank you for your prayerful support. May God bless you and fill you with the joy and peace of his presence.

+ *Cyrus*

The Rt. Rev'd Cyrus Pitman
Bishop of Eastern Newfoundland and Labrador