

MINISTER'S REPORT for 2009 Annual Congregational Meeting

Although it actually started on the first Sunday of Advent 2007, 2008 will no doubt be remembered as the year WSP celebrated its 50th. From my point of view "the Year of Jubilee" generated a lot of good things. Projects like the anniversary banner, the cookbook, the pictorial directory and the history of the second 25, are concrete fruit of the celebration, representing many hours of work on the part of many people, and will be with us for years to come. The anniversary celebration also brought a number of individuals out to church, who we had not seen in some time, with a few even staying with us, past the anniversary. It gave us an historical perspective on ourselves which is helpful in moving forward into the mission and ministry challenges of the future. And it gave us an opportunity to bless God for His goodness to us, and to extend blessing to our neighbours, (through the work of Habitat) in the form of a substantial gift. The Biblical vision of Jubilee, as we reflected at various points throughout the year, has the experience of God's freedom at its heart -- relational freedom through personal forgiveness, financial freedom through debt forgiveness, and social freedom through breaking the forms of injustice which bind others. I hope that something of the Jubilee vision will continue to inform our spirituality at WSP into the years to come.

One freedom which we did not attain during the year of Jubilee was the freedom from debt. Our local budget deficit was a matter for concerned prayer throughout much of 2008, especially after the world's economy fell apart in September, and the church's boiler shortly after that. Presbyterians Sharing is also feeling the pinch nation-wide as aging Presbyterians die, and as local church budgets compete for limited resources with the Presbyterians Sharing allocation. There is good news however:

Firstly, we can take heart that Westminster-St. Paul's is not a static congregation. The Lord sends us new people each year to console us for those we lose through death or other departure. I have become aware just in the past year of how much the face of our congregation has changed in the time since I first arrived. We have become more youthful, and we have steadily added new faces -- people of all ages -- who have become involved and regular attendees. What they bring is not only their envelope contribution but new perspectives, new enthusiasm, new potential. Praise God!

Secondly, we can take heart that the best things, not only in life, but also in ministry, are free -- or at any rate, priced well below their real value. VBS and Alpha are two of the most exciting ministries that take place at WSP, yet both practically pay for themselves. Special Days more than pays for itself. The Bible studies, prayer chain and the amazing outreach which six of our members conducted in the east side neighbourhood this summer, carry on for free. I am also so pleased that this year we have the opportunity to provide space to Al-anon, and AA groups to operate out of our basement. These ministries do not generate a lot of *revenue*, but they do represent *value*. What I see and take heart in, is that we are increasing the *value* of the ministry we are doing, while not significantly increasing our *expenditure*. That spells a bargain, grounded in the peculiar economics of God.

For these reasons -- the dynamism of our congregation and its increasing focus on high-value ministries -- I continue to regard WSP as a good place to be. My own work here focuses on preaching, sacraments, pastoral care, visionary work with the session and other committees, and hands-on work with our church's various programmes. I led worship on the 10 commandments during late Epiphany and Lent of 2008, on twelve "touchy topics" during the summer, and on the story of God in the Old Testament from the Fall, through to Christmas. I feel that the 5 weeks of study leave and holiday which I took from Easter through Pentecost in 2008 were beneficial, not only for me, but also for the church, as they made room for past ministers and ministry associates to return and conduct a service of worship with you.

Sacramental celebrations this year included the memorable baptisms of the three Mizutani children on the Sunday after Pentecost, and of father and son (Scott and Logan Trahan) in November. Adam Mitrovic and Cole Wilford were also welcomed into our midst as members by baptism. During Lent, the Christian Basics course was offered for a second time, with Kristy Wilson, Loree Saunders, Cher Clarke, Armelle Mizutani, May Scrimgeour, Rob and Darlene Brown and Scott Trahan being taken into church membership this year. Alpha also ran for the second consecutive year, during September to November of 2008. It was a delight to share the leadership of the course this time with Avril Brown, who is hopefully just the first of a group of lay leaders to assist in the delivery of adult Christian Education at WSP. Similarly, session would like to develop a team of pastoral caregivers to assist with that very demanding part of the ministry.

2008 saw George Blair, Emily Moodie, Lorna Harwood, Marg Albrecht, Ray Livingstone, Marie Winters and Ann Willis pass from our midst into the nearer presence of God. I have been here long enough now to be losing through death not only names off the church roll, but people I have come to care about and will remember always for their Christian virtue and valour.

This Fall in our biennial elder election process, we welcomed Gladys Robson onto the session for the first time and Abbie Gooding back to session, together with 5 other incumbents. Sadly, our session is now "Ruth-less," Ruth Barnett having retired after 15 years of service. This year the annual report, as you may notice, is structured differently. It is arranged to reflect the 5 working-groups of session: Worship, Outreach, Christian Education & Nurture, FISH and Stewardship & Finance. Taken together, these 5 areas of interest should pretty well cover the life and work of the church. May God bless each of them: may He fill our worship with a sense of heaven touching earth, and with the sense of his own holiness and splendour. May He turn our hearts outward, beyond ourselves, so that we become a light for Christ in our community. May He watch over the young and the young-in-the-Lord, giving us the means to pass on a living faith, one generation to another. May He so enrich our fellowship and our times of spiritual sharing that we know what it is to "abide in His love." Finally, may He so stimulate the joy of giving in us, that we are set free from financial worry to praise the Lord, and to do all things with thanksgiving, to the glory of His name.

Your minister and friend,
Karla