

A WORKING CHURCH  
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In a very short time children will be back at school. Do you remember, in those first few days of school, being asked to share what we did in our summer holidays. So we listened to twenty to thirty seemingly endless accounts of time spent at summer camp, the long, long drive to Podunk, Sask. to visit Aunt Suzie and her horrible children, or Grandma OLeary in Ecum Secum, NS.

Lois and I have just returned from a holiday in the U.K. You will be pleased to hear that I have resisted the urge of inflicting you with an account of all the wonderful things we saw and did there....EXCEPT FOR ONE ITEM!

Some of you may know this place; As you enter, along with scores of other tourists, the beautiful, historic Rosalyn Chapel, just outside Edinburgh, ...a place that played a significant role in Dan Brown's best selling novel The Da Vinci Code (a scene with the actor Tom Hanks was filmed inside the chapel)? As you enter you are met with a sign in bold print "This Is A Working Church"

In other words it is saying to all those many tourists ; " this is not primarily an historic site! This is not primarily a museum! This is not primarily a tourist attraction! THIS IS A WORKING CHURCH!

Think for a moment- What is a Working Church?

When you move into a new space, you look around to see what is available. So you test out the toaster, for example, or the washing machine, or the TV. Hopefully you will say, "well, the toaster is working" and when you says that, you are saying the toaster is doing what has been made to do. Similarly, when you say "this is a working Church" you are at least saying " this church is doing what it has been created to do"

What is that? What does it mean to say "St. Matthews is a working Church"? Does it mean that everybody is working to keep it going? To keep its bills paid? To support its outreach programme?

Let's stop for a moment and look at today's Gospel reading because it gives us a clue.....no that's not right, it gives us a profound insight into what the Church is all about. When Peter says to Jesus " you are the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of the Living God" he is articulating what the disciples have come to realize. He is saying "You are the embodiment of the living God coming into our world and into our lives.You come to call us into a life-giving relationship with the Creator, with each other, and with our world."

As time goes on and the disciples experienced the life of Jesus, they came to realize that this is a relationship centered on God's love for us, a relationship in which we experience grace, love, life, light. Jesus responds to Peter by saying

that Church, the company of His people will be built on, centered in, rooted and grounded in God's loving action.

St. Matthews ...a Working Church? I believe the basic principle that identifies St. Matthews as a Working Church is that its life is centered in, build on, rooted and grounded in the action of God Reaching out to us in love for us. As an expression of that rootedness, as a response to that rootedness, We respond with joyful worship. Everyone of us in this Working Church, the choir members, the organist, the servers, the greeters. The Readers, those leading the Prayers, the clergy, the Communion Assistants, all of us in the pews, have a role in helping this Working Church do what it has been created to do, namely offer joyful, rich, life-giving worship. We do that by participating fully . with our minds, our bodies, our spirit. There are no spectators, no passive congregants in our offering of prayer and praise and joyful thanksgiving.

I said at the beginning that I would only tell you about one item from our holidays. Dare I quietly sneak in one other item; In Salisbury Cathedral, In one of the side aisles, there are a set of panels, perhaps six or seven feet high, each one setting out some basic part of the Christian faith ; one telling about the Christian understanding of God, another telling about Jesus, who he was, who he is, another telling about the Bible and the Gospels, another telling about Baptism, the Eucharist. This is one way the Cathedral is trying to convey, in simple, unadorned language, the reality of Christian Faith to the hundreds of tourists who visit the Cathedral every day, men and women who are products of a secular culture, many of them with zero knowledge of the Faith.

As a Working Church, one of the features of St. Matthews will be the ongoing effort to discern creative, imaginative, appealing ways of reaching out to that great body of contemporary men and women in our society many of whom would gladly affirm that they are allergic to church, many of whom would say that the church belongs in a museum, many of whom would say that it just doesn't fit into their life style.

However, at the same time, they are experiencing cruel levels of stress and anxiety, an endless, debilitating busyness and lives cluttered by demands, pressures, and never satisfied wants. In spite of all the video games, reality shows and new information technologies, their life style doesn't lead them to lives of peace and deep inner satisfaction. Consequently, too often they live with quiet disenchantment, a deep seated sense of emptiness and a yearning for meaning, community and relationship.

As a Working Church St. Matthews will be searching for ways to attract them and persuade them to look again at Christian Faith. Let me share with you a comment made by an American author (Francis Spufford; " I came back because I made a

mess of my life in one of the characteristic ways that men in their thirties do and I found myself in need of forgiveness. And to my astonishment, forgiveness seemed to be there when I asked for it. Then, bit by bit, I discovered that this thing, Church, which I had last really paid attention to when I was about thirteen, seemed to be far subtler, tougher, richer, and larger than my child-sized understanding of it.

As a Working Church St. Matthews will be equally engaged in helping present members experience the reality of God through prayer, worship and [service.it](#) will help them wrestle honestly with questions of what it means to be a responsible member of the human family, what it means to be a follower of Jesus in the midst of all the ambiguities, fiascos, heartbreaks and suffering of our world.

What does it mean for St. Matthews to be a Working Church? It means St. Matthews will be a community bound together by God, acting and interacting with one another, giving and forgiving, bearing and forbearing, growing, changing, transforming and sharing God's love for us with the world around us. It will mean its members serve on committees trying to find ways of providing homes for the homeless, joining with groups seeking to protect the earth, Working with Habitat for Humanity, Doctors Without Borders, PWRDF, food banks, shelters for the abused, visiting the lonely, assisting refugees.

Members of this working Church will return to this place Sunday by Sunday, to learn again the way of truth, to confess our own failures and missteps, to give thanks, to catch again the vision, to be renewed, healed and strengthened. Then, empowered by the Spirit to go out into the world unafraid to be agents of peace and compassion.

St. Matthews is a Working Church. Help it be so more fully !