

Moose Factory Journal....1-30 DEC 2002

A reminder.... This is only a journal, a jotting of candid notes, as I observe something, or try to understand something while I am here. I'll probably refer back to parts of the journal several years from now. And then I'll have some material to consider when I ask if I got it right. If the material is useful to you, I am grateful. But remember, I may very well have changed my mind by the time you are reading the material.

Monday, 2 December, 2002

The air was crisp early this morning. The window thermometer near the Kitchen Sink said 13 below – Fahrenheit. There was no wind. The sky was perfectly clear when Gwendolyn and I first went out early. Daylight was just breaking. We could see one or two planets and a sliver of the moon in the lightening sky. In the near distance a dog cried softly. Gwendolyn was mildly interested. We both hurried back into the house after a short walk.

I wondered if that dog would survive the cold. Raymond has an 'outside dog'. I think his name is 'Killer'. Killer – or whatever his name – is a ****very**** amiable beagle. He never wanders (except to Church) and Raymond says he does fine. Killer does have a nest under the back porch – complete with blankets, so he can curl up out of the weather. Others are less fortunate. Gwendolyn is one of the very few that parks regularly under the duvet.

Dog-culture is different here. Not too long ago they were important items in the economy. That is, some were culled from the roving canine population and raised to pull sleds – and for other purposes as well. One does not make a pet out of a beast of burden. Now dogs may be on their way to becoming pets – some, anyway. There is a vet who comes up to Moosonee now three or four times a year from Timmins or Cochrane. People, like me, who fuss over their dogs, as I fuss over Gwendolyn, are still rare. One elder told me that in his day some dogs – not all that long ago -- when chained up at night outside, WOULD freeze to death.

Wednesday, December 4, 2002

I just finished a report on attendance: eleven years of figures for each of the Sundays of each of the years. This will give the Vestry a handy little tool to play with. Numbers are just numbers; you shouldn't read too much into them. But when there are patterns – depending on what those patterns look like – there are questions you may want to ask or hunches you can test.

Tuesday, December 10, 2002

Sunday was COLD. We celebrated a Baptism, however, complete with warm water. Next Sunday the kids do their annual Christmas bash. The Sunday after that the Choir does their annual Christmas bash. The evening Service starts up at the Little Church (right here where I sit) next Sunday. The 11 o'clock Service moves to the Little Church right after Christmas. The Big Church is basically impossible to heat beyond a certain arctic chill.

Sunday evening one of the vestry groups threw a Roast Beef Dinner. EVERYBODY was there – which made for lots of fun; AND the roast beef ran out. I was stuck with veggies (and several desserts.)

Thursday, December 12, 2002

The scanner arrived on Tuesday. Now the desktop publishing business is up and running. It cost a few thousand bucks to get all this hardware and software here. But it's here, and it works. Part of the infrastructure of the parish is already built. We can do bulletins. The info sheets for weddings and baptisms are getting used. We can track attendance. At least the

Moose Factory Journal....1-30 DEC 2002

structures are in place for a parish file (info on individuals) and also for parish finances. The remaining, unresolved catastrophes are the mailing & parish list as well as the parish finances.

I breathe more easily, now, because one monkey is off my back. We can produce quality paper with little effort. Of course, the parish will have the same problem, once I am gone, until or unless the parish designs the means by which somebody else can do this work. For the time being, though, we're ok.

A great deal of what I have been doing, of course, would have been done elsewhere by a parish secretary – those heroes (or heroines, rather) who are never noticed until they are absent, and everything falls apart. Actually, I had never thought I would be doing this kind of work here when I was still down south. But it's work that has to be done; that is, other things won't happen, until or unless it IS done.

The weather has turned positively balmy. Yesterday saw temperatures a few degrees above freezing. Today may be even warmer. I DID see a pick up truck on the ice yesterday. But I haven't heard that vehicular traffic is a regular thing now between Moose Factory and Moosonee. I, personally, will wait for the School Buses before I drive across the ice. If the ice is strong enough for them, it will be strong enough for me. But not until....(!)

The ten-year report on attendance figures has already stirred the pot. I had burrowed through the 'Vestry Book' to get the numbers. (The 'Vestry Book' in Canada is basically the same thing as the 'Red Book' for Episcopalians in the United States. It lists the number of persons present as well as the number of communions for each Service entered.)

I realized that the ten-year report had stirred interest the day after I had distributed materials to Vestry persons for this next Tuesday's vestry Meeting. I was at an Elder's house the next day, and she already knew about it. The grapevine works.

The over-all attendance at St. Thomas' increased dramatically in the ten-year period and then started to fall just as abruptly about two years ago. What happened? I suspect that question will energize some folks for a while. Another thing, though, about the stats: the attendance at Holy Week Services has not seen the same rise and fall; those numbers, if anything, may be climbing. While it might only be my hope – rather than reference to hard data – it might just be that slowly a congregation is emerging from the much more widespread and partly marginalized parish. That's the hope. Time will tell how realistic it actually is.

While swings in attendance may be linked with the comings and goings of specific priests, that seems only partly true in this case. Attendance (participation) increased right after Father Wayne arrived. And his work had a major part to play in that, no doubt. But the decline set in discernibly before he left. While what he did had its strengths and weaknesses – as is the case for any cleric – the decline may originate from something other than his ministry. Some have already suggested that the start of the decline coincides with the emergence of the Residential Schools as a pervasive issue in the Church as well as for the rest of Canada – particularly Northern Canada.

I had pondered my way into all of this in my thoughts of last month, because I was picking up on something I didn't understand, particularly from the more marginalized families; and I was trying to make sense out of that. Since then folks have suggested there was (and is) a piece I had not addressed. I had picked up on a kind of floating, pervasive anger that was finding a lightning rod in the Church. And, of course, I was using my own anger as a reference point – a tool to use in trying to comprehend what was going on. The piece I missed was what I can only

Moose Factory Journal....1-30 DEC 2002

describe as a kind of panic. That is, when the publicity concerning the litigation involving the Anglican Church and the Residential Schools surfaced, some folks just could not bear to be in an Anglican Church at that time. When they did attend Church, the memories (and the wounds and the scars) all came back; and they experienced a kind of suffocation – and simply had to leave. I have been told that every once in a while one or two of these folks do show up in Church now – never all at the same time; but every once in a while someone is there – perhaps to test whether it's safe to return.

Friday, December 13, 2002

The Bishop has been chatting on the phone recently about the possibility of placing a newly ordained priest in Moose Factory in order to learn some of the ropes. Poor dear souls! Who would expect to land in a pot with an old curmudgeon rebuilding the wings in mid-flight? I can't wait.

Monica has informed me that I am expected to recite The Lord's Prayer in Cree on Christmas Eve. It isn't going to happen – this year. There's hope, however, for next year. I should just park myself out in the bush for eight weeks with a family. For now, however, I have neither time nor opportunity.

The Elders on The Island – or most of them – had their annual Christmas Party at the Parish Hall tonight. I sat at one of the tables and enjoyed the turkey and roast ham – along with some wonderful company.

Monday, December 16, 2002

Yup, another download and update – for the scanner.

Wednesday, December 18, 2002

Regular Vestry Meeting was last night – which meant that I didn't sleep much before, during, or after. Then I spent the entire night getting a bug out of the e-mailer. I think someone (inadvertently) had sent something nasty. It didn't take a second to do what needed to be done. But it took me hours to figure out what that was.

At the Vestry Meeting we began the transition to a new Treasurer. We are building the financial program from the ground up. THIS time St. Thomas' will go by the Book (ie Canons & Policies of the Diocese.) At least now there is the realization that this is a good thing to do. These things are hard on everybody; but, so far, so good. The major problem was that we waited so long before we did anything. Of particular concern to me is that nothing was done until I was here for several months – gradually waking up to the problem. I was perceived as the Authority who would deal with the matter. I was expected to act as a 'flag-boss' – not a good omen for the transition of the Priest to a more indigenous model. (And, as was said -- in Cree-think -- you don't worry about the chopper in the air. Just worry about the ground below. Well, this time, we got close.)

Today I basically took the day off, put on the Bach Orgel Werke (15 hrs, 9 min, 4 sec) and vegged out.

Moose Factory Journal....1-30 DEC 2002

CHRISTMAS DAY

It's been a busy week. And it's not over, either. We had a death early in the week. Funeral was yesterday noon. Family Service the night before. Two Christmas Services last night. A morning Service today. Tomorrow we'll probably have a wedding rehearsal. Friday is the day of the wedding.

The wedding has taken a beating. The Bride and Groom knew that Christmas would complicate things, so they scheduled the rehearsal for the end of last week. However, the best man just didn't get here from Albany until Monday night. Once the whole wedding entourage was safely on The Island, funeral and Christmas activities were at full throttle. Tomorrow is another day. Anyway, I've known weddings that went forward without rehearsals.

Freeze-up went into a lull. It is now colder – but not yet really COLD. We had a thaw for almost two weeks. The highway suffered greatly. Last week a bulldozer went through the ice. And, of course, it went through over the newly-dredged channel. Nobody was particularly excited about that. Evidently these things are to be expected. The driver got wet; but he is ok. A passing taxi picked him up before he got too cold.

Now, only skidoos are going back and forth. Taxis, which were canoes in the summer, are now skidoos. They pull enclosed sleds. And they do a very brisk trade. One of the interesting features of the highway – at this time, anyway – is that when the tide comes in, it does not come in under and lift the ice. It comes in and covers the ice – at least along the shore. Driving on ice over a busy current with a few inches of salt water on TOP is not my idea of the ideal driving experience. It would seem to me that if some SUV manufacturers REALLY wanted driving conditions where they could show off their products, they would pick the Moose Factory – Moosonee Expressway. We have EVERYTHING! Glare Ice – what there is of it. Salt Water. Hills and Gullies. Snow dunes. The works.

Ditch Update:

I am by no means the only person to end up in the ditch (with auto.) Since my own personal ditch experience, I now have seen two other vehicles in the same ditch – MY ditch – with indeterminate vehicular identities (no plates.) ALSO, yesterday, the Municipal Front Loader got swallowed. THAT was a sight! Warmed my heart to see those mega wheels poking up through the snow and catching the crisp morning air and sunshine. The Grader hauled it out. I am not alone. I am now stalking The Grader. I want to be there when it goes under....

Thursday, December 26, 2002

Today is Boxing Day. CBC had a special report this morning. Their roving holiday reporter had a direct report from Canada Customs. Santa got busted at the Border. Papers were not quite right, and there was a six-hour delay. Back at The Pole Mrs. Claus fretted. All Canada lent support (and complained about Customs.)

G-G's IS open for a post-Christmas sale. The whole town is lined up outside and inside – except for one family; they are keeping Vigil at the Hospital. We're about to lose another Elder. The wedding is lurching towards completion. Right now the rehearsal is on for 6 pm tonight and the Wedding for 3 pm tomorrow; and lots of cooks are frantic. Raymond is staying close to the Vigil, as well as to the family, which he knows well and which knows him well. I'm staying with the Wedding.

Moose Factory Journal...1-30 DEC 2002

Some thoughts about Raymond and St. Thomas'

Raymond and I have shared all of this following material, often many times over in the past five months, although I am presenting it here in my own way. As I told Raymond, I'm not looking at Raymond so much as I am looking at that population amongst whom he labors.

Raymond was ordained to the Diaconate some years ago – as an intentional or permanent Deacon. That is, his ministry focus is distinct from that of a Priest. His ministry focus has related to those on the margins of this community – particularly those disabled by addiction. And they are many. For years The Hudson's Bay Company employed him as Manager of the Meat Department. He was forced into early retirement by a physical difficulty – nerve damage to his right arm as a consequence of his work. In his retirement he has labored constantly in recovery programs with broken people. And he has served as a Deacon in The Church. His gift of compassion and insight is incredible.

Raymond is about my age. The Canons of The Church in Canada require us 60-year-old youngsters to retire from Church work at age 65. We may be at the height of our powers at that age, but we have to quit and make room for someone else. That means Raymond and I will probably disappear from St. Thomas' at about the same time.

Raymond has lived on The Island for about 45 years. He met Marion, his wife of many years, here on The Island. In his younger days he was not exactly an Anglican Deacon. He came slowly and late in life to the Anglican Church. Early in life, he cut a fairly wide swath across The Island. But, he is one of those people who survived his youth, and he has grown powerfully throughout his entire life.

During the seven or so years of my predecessor the Priest called upon Raymond's considerable abilities as pastor repeatedly. In retrospect this may not have been the best thing to do, but I am sure that no one then could have guessed at that. To all outward appearances, joining the Deacon's and the Priest's ministries into one powerful pastoral presence on The Island strengthened the work of the Church. All kinds of people really appreciated that effort. And many cannot understand why we haven't put humpty-dumpty back together again – now that there is a new Priest on The Island.

The problems began to surface sometime after the departure of my predecessor. I now think that the issues were up and running well before he left. But they became unavoidable for Raymond some time between Priests. Raymond was certifiably burnt out when I arrived here in August. The problem, as I understand from Raymond's telling of it, appeared when he was called upon to make pastoral interventions (weddings and burials) on top of everything else. But I don't think that this time around he experienced just the kind of overload that occurs in churches – especially when there is one man standing and holding the bag. I think there's more that was going on; and I think it's going on now.

In his 45 years of being on this Island Raymond has come to know just about everyone. And he has labored greatly with the most fragile people on The Island. The Community has responded, indeed. He has been elected or appointed as a member of the Band. The Community has adopted him – an honor that certainly is rare and probably is unique. What happened?

Raymond has lived long enough in this Community to become absorbed by each family. In this sense he has grown into the role of the mission priest I described in last month's journal. Never mind that he is a Deacon with a focus outside the immediate precincts of the Congregation. None of that matters in the traditional family structure. What matters is that he is known and trusted – that his history and the family's history have become one in the same. He is not

Moose Factory Journal....1-30 DEC 2002

called upon to exercise spiritual powers so much as he is called upon for pastoral care. In the mind of the public he has become the best resource possible from the Church – or anywhere -- for the vanished shaman. Even now, when there is trouble, people call Raymond. The presence of a new (white) cleric is irrelevant; the pastor/shaman is already here. And he is Raymond.

However, the client group – or family -- served by that Deacon/Shaman/Holy Man does not total around 150-250 people, as it would in a traditional, semi-nomadic, ordinary family. It includes the entire Island -- numbering 3,000 to 5,000 people. Raymond, in other words, has become the lightning rod for that incredible hunger in a culture that has lost both its capacity to express its need as well as its capacity to accommodate its need – beyond the helpful, though limited, ministrations of The Pastor. (My thesis, which I am testing in this Journal, is that the Anglican Pastor is a substitute for that previous indigenous shamanistic role.)

So there is enormous energy behind the call for The Pastor. But the pastoral relationship always is geared to help people through crises and difficult transitions. In five months (since August) I have never heard it described as relating in any significant way to spiritual or vocational growth, ministry focus, or maturation of discipleship. Healing, yes, especially in the recovery of those addicted as well as those suffering from disease, as well for the healing sought in bereavement. But that's about it. It's enough to get us through the day (when the practitioner can be found.) But it doesn't quite work. The language and symbols of one culture are used as a substitute for the lost symbols of another culture; and they don't quite fit. The closer you get to the core of the Parish, the closer the fit; the further you get from the core of the Parish, the less the symbols actually work. (That's probably true universally; here, however, at least this one issue is specific.)

Of course, one way to describe all of this is to think in terms of an institutional chaplaincy. In this sense, we might be talking about a Chaplain to the Village or to The Island. There's a large but specific population – 3-5 thousand people, all residents of Moose Factory. And, given the specificity of that population there predictably are issues that surface repeatedly. This is true in Hospitals, Prisons, Army Bases. The Chaplain/Pastor works with the folk to address those issues as they arise.

But there are some differences, also, between that Chaplaincy model and what is going on here. The population is static, rather than transient. The Chaplain/Pastor is related to families and individuals – maybe not always by blood but, rather, by something far more profound. In HIS mind he may experience some level of detachment. In the mind of client group, however, he is anything BUT detached. And, that, for the client group, is what is so important. He is a member of the family.

In any case this work has rarely, if ever, related to congregational development, personal growth (beyond the immediately presented issue) and responsibility, or issues involving spirituality, vocation, or stewardship. It might well be that Raymond would never have been adopted if he HAD raised any of those issues – however non-confrontively. Or he might have been rejected. And they are issues far more appropriately raised by a non-white; otherwise they could come across as part of an authoritarian harangue or cultural obtuseness. But except where/when they ARE addressed/processed, the future of St. Thomas' remains in doubt.

Remedies – or a creative approach....

OK ... So what are we going to do about this?

Raymond will retire from active ministry as a deacon in about five years. He realizes that if these present demands from the Community on his time, psyche, and being continue, he may

Moose Factory Journal....1-30 DEC 2002

well have to move off The Island just to be able to survive. He and I are talking about that. And we are beginning to talk about that with others. When I restrict his involvement in a wedding or funeral I am doing that (by mutual agreement) to protect him and to ease the transition whereby (in the Community's mind) he is the point man for family transitions. Remember, this is the marginal population we are talking about. The core group of St. Thomas' doesn't behave this way.

One reason why the Anglicans are called upon so often by non churched people is that the other denominations are not nearly so accommodating and often simply refuse their services even when there has been a death or there will be a wedding.

So, St. Thomas' needs to decide NOW if it wants to continue this ministry – and, if so, how? A diaconal cadre (whether formalized, ordained, or labeled as such) needs to be in formation now, if that work will continue after five years. (The work will continue regardless of what St. Thomas' does. Communities have a way of raising up what they need when they need it. The question, then, more precisely, is whether St. Thomas' wants to be involved in that work. If it is involved, it will have the opportunity to influence what happens. If it is not involved, it's out of the loop.) To whatever extent St. Thomas' is involved will be determined by what St. Thomas' can afford in relationship to what St. Thomas' is committed to. Decisions on all of that are irrelevant, if made by the (White) Priest alone. They are relevant if made by The Vestry only to the extent that The Vestry is thoroughly representative of the core Congregation. The effective decision, then, is the consensus of the Congregation.

This provokes the more basic set of questions: Who is St. Thomas'? And to what Mission IS St. Thomas' committed?

Attendance figures this Christmas – with the two Christmas Eve Services along with the Christmas Day Service – ran to about 150 people. Holy Week Services seem to range between 20 and 35. The active Congregation is somewhere between those numbers. I don't have a clear idea of the average age of that group. There are some younger folks and many Elders. Also, starting now, we are intentionally saving, whenever possible, the identities of those who support St. Thomas' for future reference. It's not WHAT the person gave that interests me. It's WHO GIVES that is so important. In one sense this IS the Congregation. (Average pledge/contribution divided by number of givers – over a ten year period – would be really interesting information; but it's not available.) In a third sense, the central core of the Congregation is that group of people present at the Celebration of New Ministry and the Workshop the night before. Anyway, most who call themselves 'Anglican' are not part of any Congregation in any meaningful sense. The days when one can identify oneself as 'Anglican' or by some other denomination and do nothing further in ones' life to live into that identity are fast receding. In another generation those days will be gone.

The actual Congregation is very distinct from that larger marginalized population. And the Congregation has some very real and very specific needs. While it might take six to ten Deacons to cover the ground that Raymond covers, pastoring the Congregation involves significantly fewer people. And the project is qualitatively different. In the case of the Congregation, each person needs to be growing in his/her ministry. The days that any congregation can survive the passive participation of its constituency are rapidly ending.

I find my own energies focusing on this small core group. This is the group that needs to be nurtured and cultivated. Hopefully it will produce an indigenous priest. My dream is that my successor will be that priest – just as, perhaps, the diaconate also will indigenous. But the

Moose Factory Journal....1-30 DEC 2002

community of faith to which that (or any) leadership belongs needs an increased awareness of itself. Most of what – or how – I preach through the winter will come from that perspective.

Tuesday, December 31, 2002

The preceding rant took me a few days to concoct. Sorry to bore you with my own internal rumblings, but that's how I get myself centered. I just have to line out what I see and then plod my way through to what I'm going to do about it. The issues here – even with the cultural angles – are nothing new to folks who know small parishes. And the phase about to be entered by St. Thomas' has been faced by many other parishes. One of remarkable things about St. Thomas', however, is that it does not lack for leadership – actual and potential. The problems come up in how people understand themselves and how they understand what is going on around them. Different people have different thoughts on the matter, but the congregation is in search of consensus.

The third funeral (in ten days) was yesterday. The Committal in the cemetery was not prolonged. The temperature was a reasonably crisp five degrees Fahrenheit, and there was a continuous wind blowing in from the northeast. Nobody lingered much. Afterwards the family invited all of us to the Parish Hall for a feast, photographs, and memories.

When I got back to the house, Gwendolyn was relieved to see me more relaxed. I put on L'enfance du Christ, which I had been saving for the moment when I was done; I have done nothing useful since. WABUN – the camp I worked at until the mid seventies – has sent out their annual newsletter. They did a profile on jbe, replete with stories long forgotten or vigorously denied – or both – by yours truly.

The Island is running out of gas. There are two pumps on The Island: Northern Stores and TJ's. (TJ's is a local entrepreneur.) Northern Stores only pumps now for emergency vehicles. TJ's is bringing gas over from Moosonee in his pickup truck. The tankers should start up across the ice any time now. I think the van has enough for another week or so.

Also, yes, finally, really, broadband started up. I'm streaming NPR and a good classical music station – one in North Carolina (of all places!) I'm looking for others, if you know of any.

It's late, but I'm not staying up till midnight. I'm told that that's when all the guns fire. (And there are a lot of guns on this Island. I don't think Gwendolyn knows about this. Right now she's relaxed, but we could have an interesting night.

Happy new Year!