

Dear Sisters and Brothers – Beloved Friends – of Gathering Table:

J R R Tolkien's hobbit hero, Bilbo Baggins, says at one point that 'few can foresee whither their road would take them until they come to its end.' This has certainly been the reality through which we have walked together even before there was a 'Gathering Table' – through the long and winding road since I came to Thunder Bay about six and a half years ago to begin walking with the people of St Luke's, then in combination with the people of St John the Evangelist, through years of discernment and visioning, as both those parishes died and the new parish of Gathering Table emerged in a resurrection sort of way.

Throughout this time, I have returned time and time again to the lines of the poet Antonio Machado: '*se hace camino al andar*' – 'you make the road by walking'. Together with Jesus at our very elbow we have walked through many things to make this road: through worship and mission, through the valley of the shadow of death and the hope of the resurrection, through times of transition and uncertainty, as well as through times of joy and celebration.

Through this journey, while I have spoken often and persistently about our 'belovedness', this has not been merely a sentimental or theological abstraction. Both Nancy and I have come to love you deeply as we have shared together in relationships embodying this very real 'belovedness'.

It is more difficult than I can possibly say to have to bring to you the news today that this part of our journey together will soon end. While we never wanted to – nor thought we would – leave Thunder Bay, I will be turning 65 years old in August – a time of decision and discernment of my future as a priest and our future as a family with children and unexpected grandchildren long separated by geographical realities.

Furthermore, the gospels make quite clear that hearing the call of God and following, as a disciple of Jesus is not an easy thing. The process sometimes involves leaving one place and going to another.

At some point after my birthday, I will be retiring from ministry at Gathering Table as well as in the Diocese of Algoma and the Anglican Church of Canada. As I tell you this today, with a very heavy heart, another announcement is being made at Southwick Community Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Western Massachusetts that I will become their new pastor.

In addition to the personal struggles that this involves, we also face the uncertainty of timing. This uncertainty is the product of the immigration process, which remains something of a 'wild card'.

Archbishop Anne asked me to assure you, as Jesus did his first disciples, that you will not be left alone. I have been in conversation with both the Archbishop and Archdeacon Deborah about this reality and have been assured that I will remain active in my pastoral roles here as we await more certainty about dates. Meanwhile, Archbishop Anne and others will be working with parish and deanery leadership to determine steps forward for Gathering Table and toward finding the right pastor to walk with you as you continue making the road.

For many of you, I am sure that this will be heard as 'bad news', and perhaps even another kind of 'death'. Nancy and I have been grieving, and I know that this will occasion grieving for many of you as well. However, I also believe that Gathering Table is a community of faith that will know how the Creator fashions 'good news' out of 'bad news' – how the Creator, as the Celtic people said, is 'the Waymaker' and will make a way where no way is apparent.

Both Nancy and I want to say *chi miigwetch* for all the many sacramental signs of love, support, encouragement and caring during our time here.

Mitákuye Oyás'ij. Nii'kinaaganaa. All My relations.

Godspeed.

George+