

St Luke's in the City

3rd Sunday in Lent

11 March 2007

Celebrating at the CROSSroads

Dear Friends,

Some of you will be aware that two among us have been testing vocations. Megan Herles-Mooar and Deacon Jim McKenna are both exploring God's call to them. I am making this 'public conversation' because the process which they are undertaking now involves us. Both have been wrestling with this search for some time, years in fact, as a largely personal quest, though I know that both Jim and Megan have called upon the confidence and friendship of some of us. Both have met with other seekers, and recently met with the Bishop's 'Examining Chaplains'. Now the process has reached the phase of the parish meetings. The week after next there will be two meetings convened by the Examining Chaplains, at which ten members of this parish community will be involved – for Jim on Monday 26 March, for Megan on Wednesday 28 March. After that Megan and Jim will be participating in the 'Discernment Weekend' at the end of April, with others from around the Diocese, the Bishop and his Chaplains.

The testing of vocations is an intensely personal enterprise. No one does this lightly. The stakes feel very high. The direction of a person's life is always changed by such wrestling. Sometimes this means ordained ministry, and sometimes it does not. For the individual this is a matter of the greatest significance, stirring deep emotions, testing patience, uncovering aspects of the self previously 'safely' hidden from public view. Those who undertake such wrestling are exposed in the Christian community, and when an ordained vocation is not affirmed by the church may find the community a hard place to be.

I said 'not affirmed by the church' because the testing of vocations only makes sense as a communal enterprise. Vocations must be felt and responded to by an individual, but do not belong to the individual. An individual's strong feeling does not of itself constitute a vocation. Ordained ministry is not a form of affirmation of certain gifts nor thanks for a person who has worked hard for the church. Priesthood and diaconate are not the possessions of special individuals. Ordained ministry, as all ministry, belongs to the Body of Christ – because ordained ministry is for the service of the Body. It is the Church which calls individuals to serve the whole community. Thus, just as it is necessary for Jim and Megan to discern what their felt call means, it is quite properly the task of the community of faith (in the tangible form of Bishop, Examining Chaplains, and parish community) to also discern what the Spirit is doing here. In seeking the mind of the Holy Spirit we make no assumptions as to outcome, nevertheless trusting that the Spirit leads us into all truth, and frequently in most unexpected directions. Let us pray for the guiding of the Spirit for Megan and Jim, for the Bishop and Examining Chaplains, and for ourselves as the local Body of Christ who seek to stand with Christ, in the service of the Kingdom, as the priesthood of all believers.

With my love, David