



Rev. Geoff Ross

## Geoff's Journal

January 2018

*"I will, God being my helper."*

As I write this – in the build up to Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve – the various news and Church websites that I read are filling up with year-end 'Best and Worst' of 2017 lists and New Year's resolutions for 2018. Reading the news sites' year-end lists is both amusing and surprising: where did 2017 go!? On the Church websites, the lists seem to focus on the best and worst habits of Church leaders and congregations. One article I read on the Christianity Today website got my attention as it echoed another colleague's recent post on his blog: both focused on how as a person of faith I should set goals rather than make resolutions. This 'takeaway' has already been helpful as I prepare for the coming year.

Most people see New Year's Day as a starting line – the beginning of a 'new you, diet, attitude' – and take off, full of commitments and good intentions, only to peter out and revert back to their 'old' selves, diets, and attitudes. The article mentioned how real, sustained, substantial change takes time; slow, deliberate, sometimes plodding, progressive work: true change is more marathon than a 100 meter sprint. The other problem with "resolutions" is they tend to focus only the presenting issue of a larger, underlying, problem or pattern: like the tip of an ice burg. If you only focus on the 'thing' you will fail. The key is to shift from a short-term resolution to a long-term goal: think about changing the root cause in order to change the effect. This is where faith comes in.

Each year, I write a goal for St. Andrew's on a whiteboard in my office – a goal identified through much prayer and observation. I do this intentionally to focus my prayers and energies on, and to remind me of, the long-term goal that God has for St. Andrew's, Brampton. In 2013, I wrote "GRACE Groups" as the goal, in 2014, it was "Term Service" for the Session, 2015 "Vision", 2016 "Congregational Care"; 2017 "Committees". I have come to see these goals as being the product of what I call 'over-the-horizon-thinking.' This type of thinking focuses on goals that are only possible through committed planning, intentional focus, and faith: it focuses not on how things are, but on how things could be – things only God can envision and hints at by calling us to faithfully follow. For 2018, I've written "Teams".

Almost twenty-one years ago, I was called and was ordained to be the Assistant Minister at Calvin Presbyterian Church. During my ordination – and during every induction I've had as a Minister of a congregation or as a Moderator of Presbytery or Synod since – I was asked several questions dealing with my faith, and how I put my faith into action. In simple terms, the questions ask whether I place my faith, trust, ministry in God's hands or in mine: whether I am a team player or not. My answer to those questions was "I will, God being my helper." And, with God as my helper, I haven't looked back.

Over the past twenty-one years, I've learned that, like life, ministry isn't a solo activity – that it's a team pursuit both spiritually and communally. While I came to St. Andrew's to be part of a team – in ministry and in service – the nature of teams is that they change. But what I know of teams is that they are only as good as the sum of their parts, especially when each player strives to do their best, not for themselves but for the team. As we prepare for 2018 – and you hear more about "Teams" at St. Andrew's, I invite you to respond to God's plan for St. Andrew's – and you – by answering; "I will, God being my helper."

May God bless you – and St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Brampton – in 2018!