

7. Beaches – East York

Community

The Electoral District of Beaches-East York, in which both The Resurrection and St, Saviour are located, is predominantly Christian. Of the population of 108,045 there are 29,005 Protestants, 27,590 Roman Catholics and some 8,800 who espouse other denominations. Of interest is the fact that there are some 27,165 people who declared they have no religious affiliation.

Church of the Resurrection

Demographic information in chart and tabular form is found at Annex A.

The Church of the Resurrection is located on Woodbine Avenue, several blocks North of the Danforth, in a traditionally working class neighbourhood. The parish straddles the boundary between two City of Toronto Communities, Woodbine Corridor and Woodbine Lumsden. Both communities have fewer immigrants than the Toronto average.

In Woodbine Corridor, to the West of Woodbine Avenue, there is a mix of semi-detached homes and low-rise apartments. Sixty-two percent of the population are of working age, between age twenty-five and sixty-four. Eleven percent are seniors, Eighteen percent are children under fourteen, and nine percent are youth, between fifteen and twenty-four. The community has more children and less youth and seniors than the Toronto average.

Sixty-seven percent of the population are English speaking, and there is a sizeable population from the United Kingdom. Twenty percent of families enjoy an income in excess of \$100,000 annually. The average family income is \$68,772.

The community of Woodbine Lumsden, to the East of Woodbine Avenue, has somewhat different characteristics. The housing mix is different. Sixty percent live in single family homes, and there are more high rise apartments. There are fewer children and youth than the Toronto average, and the same percentage of seniors, fourteen percent. Still, fifty-nine percent of the population is of working age.

Seventy percent of the population are English speaking, and twelve percent of families enjoy an income in excess of \$100,000. The average family income is \$59,096.

St. Saviour

Demographic information in chart and tabular form is found at Annex B.

St Saviour is located in the Community of East End-Danforth, on Kimberly Street, near Main and Gerrard; in a traditionally working to lower middle class neighbourhood. It also has fewer immigrants than the Toronto average.

The housing stock is a fairly equal mix of singles, semis, low-rise and high rise apartments. Sixty percent of the population are of working age, eleven percent are seniors, eighteen percent children and eleven percent youth. The community has fewer seniors and youth than the Toronto average and the same percentage of seniors.

Over seventy-eight percent of the population are English speaking, and there are a substantial number of persons of United Kingdom origin. Twenty-five percent of families enjoy an income in excess of \$100,000. The average family income is \$58,282.

Comments

Although there are differences in the communities, there is nothing of a substantial nature that should significantly affect church attendance one way or the other. A significant difference may be location. The

Resurrection is located right on a main road, while St. Saviour is the short side of a block to the East of Main Street. Both, however, have to rely on street parking. Both have easy access to public transportation, and the subway. The Resurrection is more visible; and may attract more casual attendance as a result.

Worship

The principal service at The Rez, at 10:30 am, alternates between Communion and Morning Prayer. The Communion liturgy is based on the Book of Alternative Services (BAS). Morning Prayer is based on the BCP. The early service, at 8:30 am, provides a BCP service, with one hymn, for those who want weekly communion with space for reflection. An evening service, with a contemporary liturgy, music from Taizé, and a variety of speakers is conducted at 7:00 p.m. on the first Sunday of the month. A 10:30 a.m. Wednesday service (BCP) with time for healing prayer is held on the first Wednesday of the month.

St Saviour's keeps the same service times on Sunday. Up until recently both services were Holy Communion. St. Saviour's is in some trouble, and has been on the watch list for closure. The Resurrection, which was a church re-boot from Little Trinity, is itself considering doing the same with St. Saviour's. Currently the 10:30 worship offering is a service of Glory and Praise, with a children's program; indicating, perhaps some repositioning to make the Church more accessible to community members who are not yet Anglican.

Program

I am not commenting on program in this study, except to say that it is my belief that it comes out of worship. The Church is a community established to worship God. Good works result from that process. Worship does not come from good works. The churches that have a committed social service and outreach program are the churches that have a lively faith.

Statistical Comparison

The Chart at the end of this chapter compares the statistical results from the incumbent's annual report to the Diocese, for both Churches, during the period from 1991 to 2001, which date happens to be coincident with the demographic information that was available from the city of Toronto. For any that wish to review the Diocesan statistics directly, I have included them at Annex E.

As can be seen from the figures, in 1992, the two churches had substantially the same number of members on the parish roll; however, St. Saviour was starting to show signs of malaise with a meagre 68 persons attending Sunday worship on the average. The relative position of the two held until 1996. when The Resurrection started to decline, and St. Saviour was actually starting to increase its average attendance. St. Saviour peaked at 90 in 1998, as the Resurrection was approaching its low point. In 2000, however, things turned around for The Resurrection. An influx of borrowed parishioners from Little Trinity and a few other parishes helped to re-boot the church that year. It reconnected with its community and has shown a strong pattern of growth since.

St. Saviour has continued its decline. The figures shown for 2002 actually look somewhat hopeful, considering that it had 125 attend Easter services, and maintained a church school of 22 children, despite only having an average Sunday attendance of 46. The 2004 statistical return, however, indicates a collapse to an average of 38 on Sunday, and 5 children in the Sunday School.

In the circumstances, we must ask what is it that made such a difference between these two churches? Is it the location? The Incumbent? The nature of the worship services? Some combination of the above? It does not appear that it is the community. The communities are not dissimilar enough for that. Let us turn our attention to the Resurrection, to see what made a difference there.

The Reboot of ‘The Rez’

The Rez” is a Church Re-boot that worked. Originally planted as the Church of the Resurrection in 1913 by the Rev. Leonard Baynes-Reed of St. John The Baptist Norway, it had run out of energy by 1999 and was on the verge of closure. The Rev. Chris King of Little Trinity had seen similar situations in England where a church was turned around by an infusion of people from another congregation. He communicated this vision to his associate, The Rev. Duke Vipperman, who agreed to let his name stand as a candidate for the incumbency of The Resurrection; provided that he could bring some people from Little Trinity with him. The Parish Selection Committee agreed. On January 23rd, 2000, Duke arrived with 60 adventurers from Little Trinity, and about a dozen more from other congregations.

Today, The Rez is buzzing with activity. Over 200 people attend Sunday service. There are 90 or so children on the Sunday School list. And The Rez is itself considering planting a church – perhaps a re-boot into another church which is threatened with closure.

The question is why did The Rez succeed in this situation? After all, it was a re-boot. There was a group of ‘plank owners’ who remained. They could either have made things difficult for the newcomers, or left themselves. Yet they did neither. Anglican congregations are constantly faced with similar issues – the isolation or welcoming of newcomers in their midst. Many, if not most, do not cover themselves with glory in such circumstances. In order to answer this question, the writer worshipped at The Rez on three occasions; and interviewed a founding member (from the First Resurrection People), a newcomer and the Incumbent.

The Rez is located on Woodbine Avenue, above the Danforth, in a traditionally working class neighbourhood. The Presbyterian Church just

down the road experienced decline at the same time as The Rez. That congregation chose to sell-out to a Chinese Mennonite Church.

On approaching the church building, everything seemed very quiet. There was not an unusual amount of traffic on the street or around the building. However, on entering that impression changed. Inside, the place was a hive of activity. I was greeted warmly at the door, identified as a newcomer and welcomed to the church. The rear section of the Nave had been sectioned off to form a large Narthex which doubled as space to meet and greet – and as I was later to discover – as a nursery during the service. It was filled with quite a mixture of people of all ages, chatting before the service. Posters and pamphlets describing mission, ministries and worship opportunities were readily available.

The Rez is quite a plain church on the interior. There are stained glass windows in the sanctuary. A side chapel and the Church library occupied much of the same side aisle. A large projection screen hung above the sedilia placed where the choir stalls would formerly have been. An LCD (computer) projector was mounted in the front pew, and a sound-mixing station was located in the rear pew. As we sat waiting for the service to begin the announcements were being shown on the screen. Instead of a choir, The Rez now has a gospel-rock band – a keyboard, several guitars and a drummer. Their instruments were placed either side of the aisle at front of the Church – just around the pulpit. The atmosphere was relaxed and comfortable.

When the service began the Incumbent joined the band – he plays one of the guitars. The hymns, modern praise songs for the most part, were projected on the screen. Singing was led by a cantor – one of the women from the congregation. The congregation, a mix of older people – some of the men in jacket and tie – and younger families joined in with enthusiasm.

The children's focus – a story and a praise song – was led by the incumbent, with his guitar. Afterwards, the children departed for Sunday School in the basement. The liturgy, the psalm, and praise songs were all projected on the screen so that there was no need to use either a prayer book or a hymnal; although both were available in the pew for those that wanted them. Rev. Vipperman's sermon was illustrated by video clips from *the Gospel of John* projected on the screen. Distribution of the Eucharist was shared by teams of lay ministers at both the main and side chapel altars. During communion a prayer team was available in the library portion of the side aisle to pray privately with those who needed or wished to be prayed for.

Following the service, refreshments were served in the Narthex. The placement was fortuitous. Parishioners had to transit the coffee area to exit the church. As a result, the majority stayed to socialize – a difference from other churches of my experience where the coffee hour is held in the basement or Parish Hall.

The next service I attended at The Rez was a service of Morning Prayer, based on the Book of Common Prayer (BCP) and incorporating both traditional Hymns and modern praise songs. If anything, the congregation was larger than it had been on the previous – communion – Sunday. Once again, the sermon was illustrated with video clips, and the projector and screen were used for the text of the liturgy, readings and hymns throughout the service.

The children's focus at this service was oriented towards safety in the church. At the previous service some of the children had been running about, playing in the Nave and around the music stands and instruments. Rev. Vipperman, in a humorous and sensitive way led the children in a guided pantomime of proper behaviour in church, so that everyone could have fun, but everyone would also be safe.

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In addition to the Sunday services there is a wealth of program offerings available: Alpha, Amicus (a young people's group), Men's Fellowship, A New Members Group, an Outreach Committee, small groups on a variety of topics – The Gospel of John, Parents and Tots, study of Galatians, study of Philipians, Bible Study for Busy Parents, study of The Purpose Driven Life, and a Teens group. Opportunities for participation include a Stephen Ministry, and a wide variety of tasks in the church from Alpha Leader to jobs such as Art Encouragement, Audiovisual technician, Banners Design and Sewing Group, Camp staff, Drama Coordinator to Website Wizard, in addition to the standard tasks of Chalice Bearer, Lay Delegate and the like. It would seem that there is a job for anyone that wants one, within the limits of the Diocese's Screening in Faith Policy.

Over and above volunteer opportunities there is a plethora of social events. Those being offered when I attended included: a Men's Prayer Breakfast, a Twilight Saturday Night Family Group, a Night of Music with Neil St. John and Doug Abbott, a Holly Bazaar and Tea Room, a Celtic Christmas, a parish Christmas Dinner, a Christmas Pageant and Jesus' Birthday Celebration, and Baby Showers for new arrivals. I also noted that the church had run a Parish Weekend at a retreat and conference centre, led by two professors from Wycliffe who are members of the

congregation. With all of the above, members of the church still find the time and means to be involved in sponsoring mission work – I saw material displayed on at least five projects that were held up to the congregation for prayer and financial support. They were also packing Christmas Boxes for Samaritans Purse to distribute to needy children abroad.

The “founding member” of the parish that I interviewed was a gentleman who was a member of the “First Resurrection People”, and had been attending the church for over 70 years. His wife had an even longer period of membership; in fact he met her at the church. In his “career” he has been a Warden and Lay Delegate. He remembers the halcyon days right after WWII of a prosperous church with over 1,000 members, 2 bible classes and a large Sunday School. He was involved with the decision to call Duke as pastor. Over the years before his arrival, previous ministers had created an atmosphere that caused people to leave. One minister preferred Morning Prayer and only conducted a Communion Service once a month. Five years ago there were only about 40 people at a Sunday service, and perhaps two children. The congregation called Duke because they did not want the church to die. They knew that doing so would precipitate change, but their overriding concern was the survival of the parish.

Duke instituted a complete change in the worship of the church; both in the liturgy and the music. Although there was some grumbling about the “noise”, most of the concerns were met by building a transparent sound baffle around the drummer. People adapted to the “new” music in time because they saw that it was getting new people into the church. The older parishioners are very happy with the changes because they have succeeded. Because of the manner Duke has in dealing with people nobody felt excluded.

The “newcomer” I interviewed is a student at Wycliffe who had actually lived in the area of The Rez when she was in her twenties; and who knew what it was like before Duke came. She reported that the church was “dead” back then, and that it did not meet her needs. Although the people were nice to her, she was not being “fed”, and she left to explore a different denomination. She came back to The Rez several years ago when she enrolled in Wycliffe. By this time she had children, and Marion Taylor recommended The Rez to her as having a wonderful children’s ministry. Her children had been attending a Pentecostal Sunday school and were not happy with just songs and candy, and not being given opportunities to learn about Jesus and the Bible.

She felt at home right away; noting that she was accepted just as she was, and did not have to explain herself all the time. She particularly appreciated Duke’s preaching style; the children’s programs which did live up to expectation; the hospitality and the teaching. It is important to her that the church’s worship style has balance; not putting mind ahead of heart, but not doing away with mind. She also likes not having to flip through a lot of books and having a variety in worship. She appreciates the mix of people she meets there – an educated group, with a lot of young families, university students, and professionals.

In my conversation with Duke, I learned that he had been assessed as having a church planter’s skill-set in 1986, but had no previous opportunity to put his abilities to work. The opportunity represented by the Resurrection, then, was something he had thought about for some time.

His immediate predecessor at The Rez had offered the Eucharist exclusively. During his tenure, the church lost its music group and a large part of its Sunday School, because he refused to do a dedication of children.

He acknowledged that his original concept was not exactly the church that I saw on my visits. When he accepted the position, he brought the existing congregation to understand that they had to shift the culture of the church to conform to the community around it in order to survive. He asked for, and got, a three year commitment to such a program.

The service offerings evolved in response to the congregation's preferences, modified in response to actual experience of what worked and what did not. Initially he tried family services, but the families did not feel the children were old enough to be in church throughout. So he reverted to the more traditional model of the children starting in church and leaving for Sunday School after the children's focus. The use of the computer projector and screen came about in response to an expressed need for mothers to be able to fully participate in worship while looking after young children and babes-in-arms. The congregation wanted blended worship, so both the Book of Alternative Services and the Book of Common Prayer were retained as liturgical resources. Morning Prayer was brought back because it was a part of the tradition valued by the 'First Resurrection People'. There was also not as much demand for the Eucharist in the first couple of years because many of the new people attracted to the church came from other denominational traditions - such as Baptist and Brethren - or were unchurched. In fact, he feels that up to one third of his congregation is starting over from square one; with church somewhere in their background, but having been personally distant from it.

His style is to introduce change with the promise that he will fix things if it does not work. Because he is open with the congregation about this, and has demonstrated that he will make good on his promise, they allow him considerable latitude. His focus is "re-convergence". He prefers the views of the newcomer because that is the cutting edge of the

church's relationship with its community, but he listens to everyone and recognizes that the playing surface is always shifting.

One of the keys to his success is that he takes care to remind the congregation, with some regularity, that it is not all about "us"; that they have to spread the faith outside the four walls of the church into the community outside their doors. The proof of the worth of that strategy is that 80 percent of the congregation could walk to church.

Today, The Rez is at 80 percent capacity, and is exploring the possibility of "re-booting" another church as a vehicle for growth. A necessary prerequisite for this initiative will be the addition of an assistant for Duke; since he is currently the only full-time ministry professional.

In summary, The Rez is a re-boot that works. It does so because it has had the benefit of a visionary leader who has been able to communicate his vision to others, translate his plan into action without losing the support of the original congregation, and build authentic Christian community during the process.

Analysis

In considering the story of The Rez, the significant portion for the purposes of my thesis is that a third of the congregation have come from somewhere else. They were either from another denomination or were unchurched. The alternating service of Morning Prayer and the once a month Taize service provided additional entrance points to the church community that facilitated their involvement. Without that friendly access, would they have stayed? Certainly some would have, purely due to the personal charism of the incumbent; but it is by no means certain that they all would have.

Notice also that eighty percent of the parishioners walk to church; this in a community where the Presbyterian Church just down the street

closed and sold because there were not enough Christians in the neighbourhood to make things viable for them.

In the circumstances I believe that we are entitled to say that Morning Prayer contributed to the growth of this parish. By inference we can say that a Eucharist-only approach would likely not have had the same degree of success.

There is another point of importance in the story The Rez, there are 90 or so children on the Sunday School list. Many of the parishioners at the Rez, principally the parents of these children, are Generation X. While it is not an ideal Gen X church in terms of our discussion in Chapter 5, the Rez gets enough things right that it has attracted them to its worship. In part, I believe, it is that when one has children, one matures somewhat. In part this change is thrust on us by our new responsibilities. The Gen X church that was described would not have been appropriate for parents with young children; but was very appropriate for young singles and child-free couples. Still both groups come from the same roots. I could not have seen these mothers and children feeling as welcome, or being as welcomed, at my own parish, St. Thomas's; or, indeed at many other Anglican parishes of my acquaintance. The Rez, however, is big on relationships; and being Gen X, so are they, and they feel at home.