

The Ascension Story
Farewell Words to the People of Ascension
after 8 Years of Ministry Together
by Bishop Ron Ferris
Anglican Church of the Ascension, Langley, B.C.
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It is often said that we have a large windshield and a small rear view mirror for a reason! We need to be focused on the future not on the past. But sometimes it is appropriate to stop for a moment to savour, and to give thanks, for all that God has done!

I would like to share the Ascension story. It is a remarkable story, and a modern day version of the Acts of the Apostles. It is a story about the people of Ascension, and how God has built a household of faith.

There were a number of key turning points, unexpected obstacles, and moments of breakthrough.

“We must obey God rather than human beings”. Acts 5:29

In 2008, in Ontario, Jan and I had a clear sense of calling to be closer to our family in the West and to move to B.C. After a fulfilling Episcopal ministry of 28 years, and 38 years of ordained ministry, I had a clear sense that I was meant to return to parish ministry, which was my first vocational love. We also had an inner knowing that we were to serve a fresh expression of Church, even if that meant going it “on our own”. Jan has been an astounding partner throughout all of this journey. No one could measure the depths of love and fun she has put into this launch! We had both long been involved in the Anglican Essentials Movement. Just about that time, they had launched as a church body, aligned with the Anglican Province of the Southern Cone and Archbishop Greg Venables.

Jan and I had driven through Langley many times enroute to visiting our daughter and her family in Chilliwack. There was no Anglican Network Parish in Langley. I asked my long term colleague and ally, Bishop Don Harvey, for permission to start one. He was thrilled and I was accepted as a Bishop of the Southern Cone.

Well where do you start? We had already relocated to a lovely townhome. We took a few months to settle in and reflect. Over those months we faced some serious medical storm clouds that caused us to wonder. But we stuck to the clear vision we had been given, caught our breath, and committed anew to press ahead. In another way, again God had led us through a perilous transition. “When I tread the verge of Jordan, bid my anxious fears subside”. (From Hymn 406, *Guide Me O Thou Great Jehovah*)

Scripture is filled with stories of calling, obstacles, and eventual fulfillment. We see those themes everywhere from Abraham, Exodus, Exile, the life of Jesus, and the Acts of the Apostles, even Revelation.

The first lesson we learned was that God goes before us, another theme of Scripture. The Rev James Wagner, then at Holy Cross in Abbotsford, told us of a Bible Study of restless Anglicans in Langley and offered to arrange a meeting. I call him the “midwife” of Ascension. These people had been dreaming about an eventual church, but had no realistic way ahead. One participant asked when we could start. I said “How about September?” He said with surprise, “This September!!!” From that time Bible Study has been an important part of the identity of our Parish. The emphasis on the Bible has been part of our DNA.

A gathering was advertised on April 18th, 2009 for the ABC Restaurant meeting room in Cloverdale. Thirty plus people showed up and were excited about moving ahead.

Monthly services were planned at the newly opened Langley Events Centre for May, June, July and August of 2009. There were volunteers for music, greeting, Church School and refreshments. What a blessing for me to have Deacon Rich Roberts as a partner in all of this. He is always completely steady, reliable, and mission drenched. Jenny was always beside him with joy and steadfastness. An Executive was formed that met at the townhouse. Jan and I joined in with the Bible Study and often hosted it.

That summer there was another breakthrough. A theological student from Regent College contacted me and asked if he might come to Ascension as a student. He had a Ph.D. in Artificial Intelligence, and a wife who was a professor of English, and two wonderful young teens. We met on a sunny day on the porch of a coffee shop in Crescent Beach. near where he lived. Mentoring the next generation of leaders was always part of my dream. I was amazed that people with such promising and lucrative careers were willing to forego their hard earned security to take up Christ’s ministry. We agreed to work together, and were allies for many years, through to his Ordination, placement, and eventual move to the Diocese of Egypt. Their new Bishop in Egypt was a great friend and partner of our emerging Province. Our student’s wife was a warm part of the fellowship, and hosted great Christmas parties. How we all delighted in watching their teens and friends grow up.

That June of 2009 brought me to a highlight of my working life. Jan and I travelled to Texas where I was privileged to be one of the Bishops signing the declaration that called our Province, The Anglican Church in North America, into being. We were enraptured by the thousands gathered inside beautiful Christ Church Plano for the installation of our new Archbishop, Bob Duncan. The global Primates of the Orthodox Anglican world were there, or represented, and it was they who had formally summoned us into being. After Jan and I had earlier resolved to “go it alone”, if we had too, we suddenly were gifted with a new Parish, a new Diocese, and a new Province. Instead of being alone, we were an important part of a family of 1000 Churches across North America. We didn’t need a miracle, but if we had of needed one, that would have been it!

But after we calmed down from the glow of those happenings, another obstacle confronted us. Where were we going to be able to meet? The Langley Events Centre already had another congregation and couldn’t offer us ongoing space. That summer involved the exhaustive exploration of over 40 venues. We wanted Sunday morning

worship time, accessibility, parking, Church School space, a certain privacy, and availability year round. Only two of the 40 venues proved suitable, and our Executive decided on the George Preston Recreation Centre.

A parish process allowed anyone to propose names for this new venture. After congregational balloting, “the Anglican Church of the Ascension” was chosen May 27th, 2009 and we began the task of creating community awareness. We wanted the name of our church to put Christ and His Glory and the centre of everything! The name Ascension points to the exaltation of the Risen Christ in Luke 24:50-53, Acts 1:9, and Mark 16:19.

On October 22nd 2009, we received word that we had been accepted as the 31st parish of ANiC.

“Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went”. Acts 8:4

Our Parish Council was determined to attempt to proclaim to every household in our growing community. Several times we sent our postcards and flyers to all 40,000 homes in Langley! It was a demanding project to take on, and you never really know the results. But one result was very clear. One day a remarkable couple walked in with our postcard as a bookmark in their Bible! Ascension changed immensely after that. The man took on the role of Treasurer, and even volunteered to create a needed website. Later we found that he was also a gifted Bible teacher. His arrival allowed us to care for our own finances instead of relying in our national office. We were able to become an Incorporated Society on November 1, 2010. His wife, a professional teacher, started helping the Church School Teacher who was a professional librarian. She later led the Church School and developed it further. Even though we were a little church, we always were able to field a great Church School. And how blessed we were watching the children come forward each week for their Bible Story. One member used to talk about that being the highlight of his week! The children brought us life and vitality. The faces of each one, and their love of the Bible and Church School, will be a lasting memory.

“All the believers were one in heart and mind.” Acts 4:32

All the while our activities were increasing. Ascension Praise music group developed and along came a most gifted and reliable keyboardist. Guitarists and singers were added and one regularly provided an inspirational solo ministry with powerful and thoughtfully chosen lyrics. One member was a carver and did the intricately carved Celtic cross which adorns the altar each Sunday. Another did beautiful woodwork for our processional cross, candle sticks and Advent Wreath. Our prayer team, first suggested by Padre Shane Flanagan, became an important element of every service. No heart ever needed to leave our church feeling frayed or lonely. Lay Minister Christina Page collaborated with our moms to improve the Church School and to evolve Youth Participation Sunday. Deacon Rich Roberts trained the servers, gathered intercessors and readers. Others have tirelessly worked at set-up and greeters. When one volunteer went out of his way to help a senior park her car, we teased him about having the first church valet parking service! And think of all of the fun we would have at Fourth

Friday Dinners, and the terrific Barbeque Pool Parties each summer. Many came to establish this warm expression of our community. Jan and I are thankful that so many of our services and events were enjoyed by our own family members as they travelled in from Chilliwack, Whitehorse and Alberta. And we remember thankfully, great friends and Ascension members, who have gone on ahead of us to be with the Lord.

I think we have gained a reputation for a community where searching minds and hearts can gather. We remember great presentations from scholars, preachers, and missionaries. When our Curate came there was the opportunity to explore a number of new programs and youth activities. His two ordinations in nearby Milner Chapel were landmark occasions. Christina Page followed on immediately as Lay Minister, and brought both youth and her Cambodian missionary experience to our worship leadership and to the pulpit. One woman walked into our life with a frustrated dream of starting a Chapter of Daughters of the Holy Cross. Others were seeking just such a program, and gave keen support! The dream sprouted, and Ascension had the first Canadian chapter. And there were so many who were always offering up enthusiasm and encouragement for what was happening. Some worked on our Building Committee, exploring all avenues for a permanent home. Some huge gifts, plus other pledges and loans grew to 1.1 million dollars. Although it wasn't the 1.7 needed to contemplate a project, we were awed by the trust shown in the vision for Ascension. The building fund presently has \$282,000 cash in hand, as a legacy for when the time is right, and for when a compelling project emerges. One person initiated our Summer Church School. Another at 94 led the Altar Guild, along with her friend and helper. Two of our moms coordinated the Pot Luck lunches, now monthly after service. And who can forget the time one parishioner told her story about the twentieth anniversary of her coming back from death.

“Peter,...turning toward the dead woman, he said “Tabitha, get up.” Acts 9:40

Another great miracle was the arrival of Warren's at Ascension. They had arrived from Japan, and Japanese was the first language of the children. I went to visit them after a time and learned to my amazement that Shihoko was a Regent College Grad! She and Ken had met at the Japanese Anglican Church in Vancouver. In fact her former minister was coming to Synod in Victoria to be our speaker. Bishop Stephen put together a meeting on the one day we were all to be in Vancouver. From that miraculous series of events, timing, and personalities, Shihoko became a postulant of Asian and Multicultural Ministries. Following her ordination, she and Ken would go on to found the Japanese ministry, Church of All Nations, as well as the New Eden Garden Ministry. I always believed in the miraculous power of God, but it was happening once again! The Ascension people were writing the Book of Acts!

“They broke bread...and ate together with glad and sincere hearts”. Acts 2:46

In addition to all of this, there have been 170+ visitors each year to our worship. Some become members in time. Some were visiting from other churches, or from afar. Over 160 addresses received our electronic newsletter. I remember one Mandarin speaker, Ascension welcomed her, and it was her very first time to ever be in a Christian church! They even drafted her into the choir! Some visitors are friends and family coming from

other places: Chicago, Washington State, Singapore, Cairo, Delhi. Ascension certainly has an apostolic impact on that stream of visitors. Their witness to the centrality of the Gospel, and to the beauty and authenticity of worship, lifts up hearts, homes and families, near and far.

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you: and you will be my witnesses...” Acts 1:8

Mission has been at the core of Ascension’s DNA. A portion of our budget each year goes to mission and outreach locally, in Canada, and around the world. Deacon Rich Roberts has shared his mission work with ACTS in delivering clean water to 160,000 thousand in Uganda. (Matt. 25: 37&40 “Lord when was it we saw you...thirsty...? And the king will answer them, truly I tell you, just as you did it for one of the least of the members of my family, you did it for me!” The average Anglican, and probably the average Christian, is a 16 year old African girl?

My daughter Rani has shared her years of children’s work in the orphanage she came from in Coimbatore India. Another person would tell of the churches and orphanages she would visit on her travels around the world to improve health labs. A concert was organized to help with development work in South Sudan. Another member spoke of her 30+ years of work at Bible translation in Papua New Guinea. Staff who worshiped with us linked us to Gateway Mission Training Centre, and brought a family from Korea to be a part of us. Now that family is in Korea preparing for ministry in North Africa. What great links we have had through our members to Trinity Western University, MissionsFest, Christian counselling services, and mission agencies.

God has written a story through the offering of each one. A master weaver, He takes the plain threads of our lives and weaves them into a magnificent tapestry. Jan and I are so happy that the Lord wove us into the good people of Ascension. It was one of the happiest chapters of our lives! He takes our inadequate broken bits, and makes something special for the Kingdom. What we could never do alone, God makes possible through the power of His Son who seeks to gather, bless and send out. He came to lift and enlighten the whole world!

St. Paul says, “Forgetting what lies behind...I look ahead to the prize, the upward call of God in Christ Jesus”. (Philippians 3:14) It is time for us now to look ahead. We each have transitions ahead of us. Let’s get on with it! Life, just like Holy Scripture, is a series of transitions, callings, obstacles, and fulfillments. So we press on to what God is calling us to next! For Christian believers, the best is always yet to come! Blessings and Godspeed!

See also Bishop Ron’s [“Learnings from a New ACNA Church”](#) written early in Ascension’s development



Bishop Ron & Jan Ferris with Christina Page at Church of the Ascension, Langley, BC,
5 March 2017