

## A Farewell Letter from The Very Reverend Michael J. Pitts

Dear Friends at Christ Church Cathedral, Grace Church, Pointe St Charles, the Rédempteur Community and cybernauts all,

My sabbatical leave is drawing to its end, and retirement at the end of 2009 is rapidly approaching.

The sabbatical was a wonderful way of starting the transition into the rest of my life. The first three months were spent in travel. The main focus of this was to visit, and in some cases to re-visit, countries, which, in different ways, were secular. Thus I spent time in Cuba (actually in May, before the official sabbatical began), Turkey, Estonia, Finland, Sweden, France and England. I had the opportunity to have conversations with many different people, especially around the theme of living out a religious faith in a secular society. In the case of Cuba and Turkey and France, the secularism of the society is constitutional, but that certainly does not inhibit lively faith communities of several religions in each country. Finland and England are still, in their constitutions, countries with the establishment of a church. But this has not prevented a precipitous decline in both church going and general interest in religion and faith, especially since the 1960's.

Since returning to Canada at the end of October, I have been continuing my reading of recent literature on the history and meaning of secularization. I have also been teaching myself some practical skills such as web-site design and video editing.

A fuller account of what I have been doing can be seen on my personal website, [Thoughts from Ste Julienne, on which I am continuing to work](#). As I go forward from here, I intend, in 2010, to continue this work and set up an interactive website. I hope with this I shall be able to show, by gathering stories in many media formats from diverse faith communities, that secularity is different from secularism as an ideology, and far from being the antithesis of faith and religion, can be a fertile ground in which diverse faith groups can prosper and interact in peace and mutual sharing.

So first, as I bid you farewell, I want to thank the Corporation of the Cathedral and the congregation for providing me with this opportunity, which has been so fruitful for both my intellectual and spiritual life. I also want to thank you all for the wonderful, tumultuous, sometimes exhausting, but never boring eighteen years during which I have served you as Dean and Rector. I also want to thank you for the generous farewell gift that you have made to me.

Those of you who were able to be at the farewell lunch heard me say that I believe that ghosts should not haunt. This is not only a personal belief. It is the long established custom of the Anglican Church that a former rector has no further role in the life of the community in which he or she has served. This enables the successor both to lead the community and to form relationships with the congregation without being inhibited by the presence of his or her predecessor. This does not of course prevent the continuing of personal relationships and communication providing the content of these respects the boundary between individual friendship and the affairs of the church community. My rule has always been that if you send a Christmas card or a letter during the year, I will put you on my mailing list for our annual family Advent letter. On the website I have mentioned, there is also a special e-mail address for those who are interested in knowing more, or taking part in the faith and secularity work and study. I shall also continue my ministry e-mail address, but prefer personal communication to be sent to [michael.pitts@worc.oxon.org](mailto:michael.pitts@worc.oxon.org)

Finally, I wish you all godspeed as you set about the task of identifying the next Dean and embarking

on the next stage of the life of this community.

Yours sincerely,