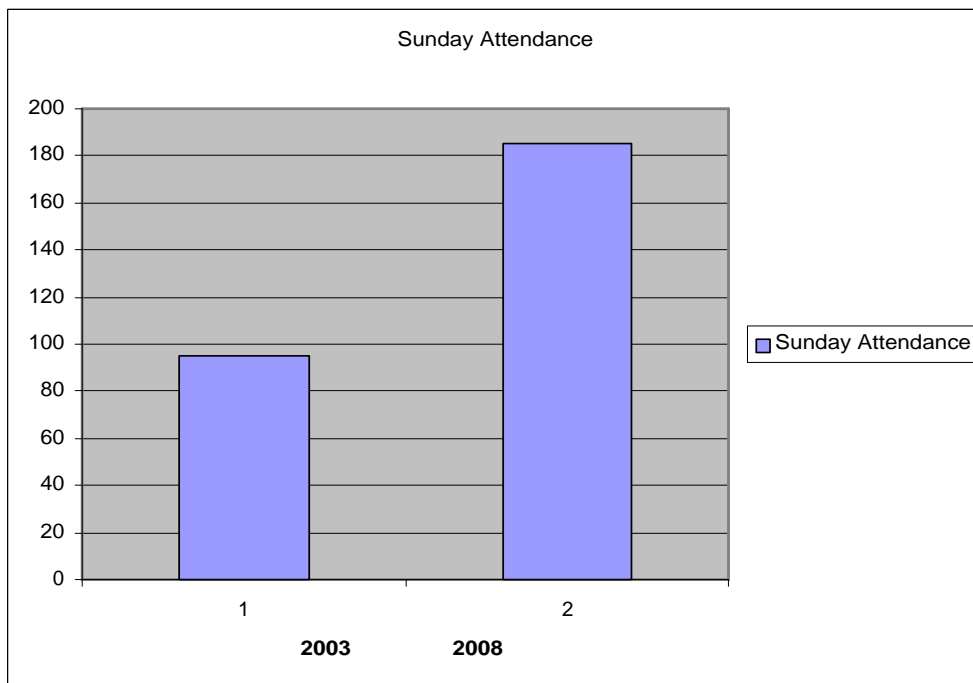


Report to Annual General Meeting of Grace Church, Markham (Vestry)

One of my favourite movies is about a young man's first summer job and the beginning of the following family holiday. Most of the movie is taken up with preparations for the departure for the annual trip to a cottage resort called *Ollie Hopnoodle's Haven of Bliss*. When I first watched this movie I laughed so hard that I cried. The movie is set in the late 1950's and the packing of the car is captivating. Everything but the kitchen sink is packed into the car. The roof rack is so full it looks like the inspiration for an Ikea commercial. The trunk is bulging and everything else including the children are stuffed into the back seat. At one point a bumble bee enters an open window and the car careens back and forth on the road as the family try to deal with it. Soon after departure the youngest child has to make a pit stop. Time and again THE question is asked: "Are we there yet??"

As this is my fifth report to the AGM of Grace Church it is a question that has crossed a few people's minds. Are we there yet??

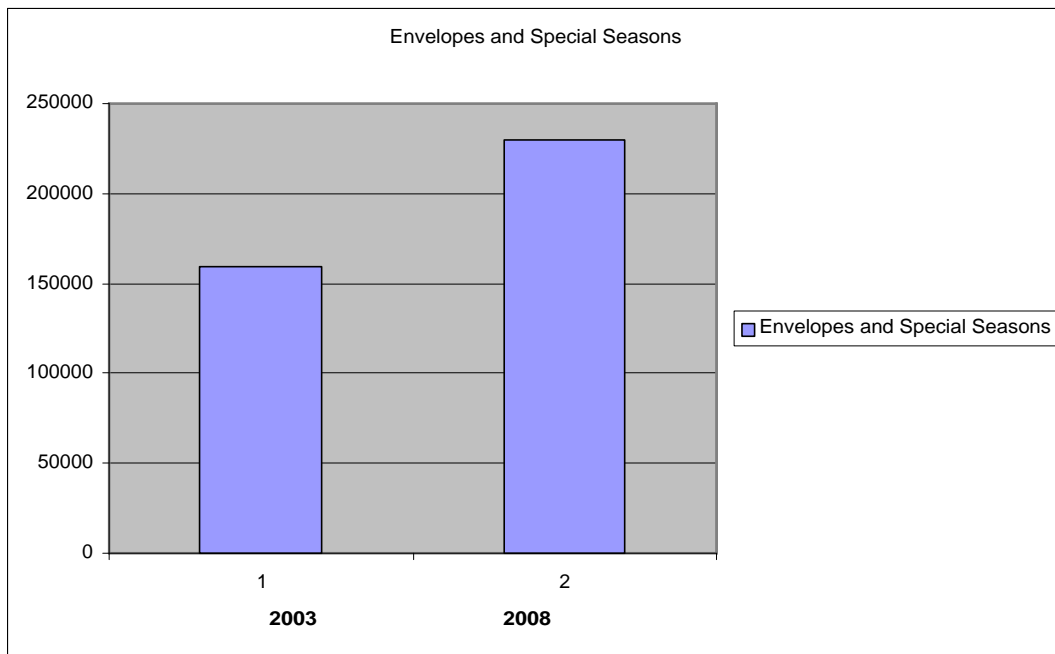
To begin to answer that question we need to first look back a few years. In 2003 the actual average Sunday morning attendance was somewhat less than 100 people at the two services. In 2008 the average Sunday attendance was 184. This is an increase of 95%. What does this look like in real terms?



In 2004 there was a special Sunday morning event in February. After the 10:00 am liturgy finished there are a handful of people in the lobby. Normally in 2008/09 after the

10:15 am liturgy finish there are so many people in the lobby that it is like a convention crush court? It is an happening place! Are we there yet?

In 2003 the year ended with envelope and special seasons' givings totaling \$159,025. While in 2008 the envelopes and special seasons totaled \$229,399. An increase of 44%.

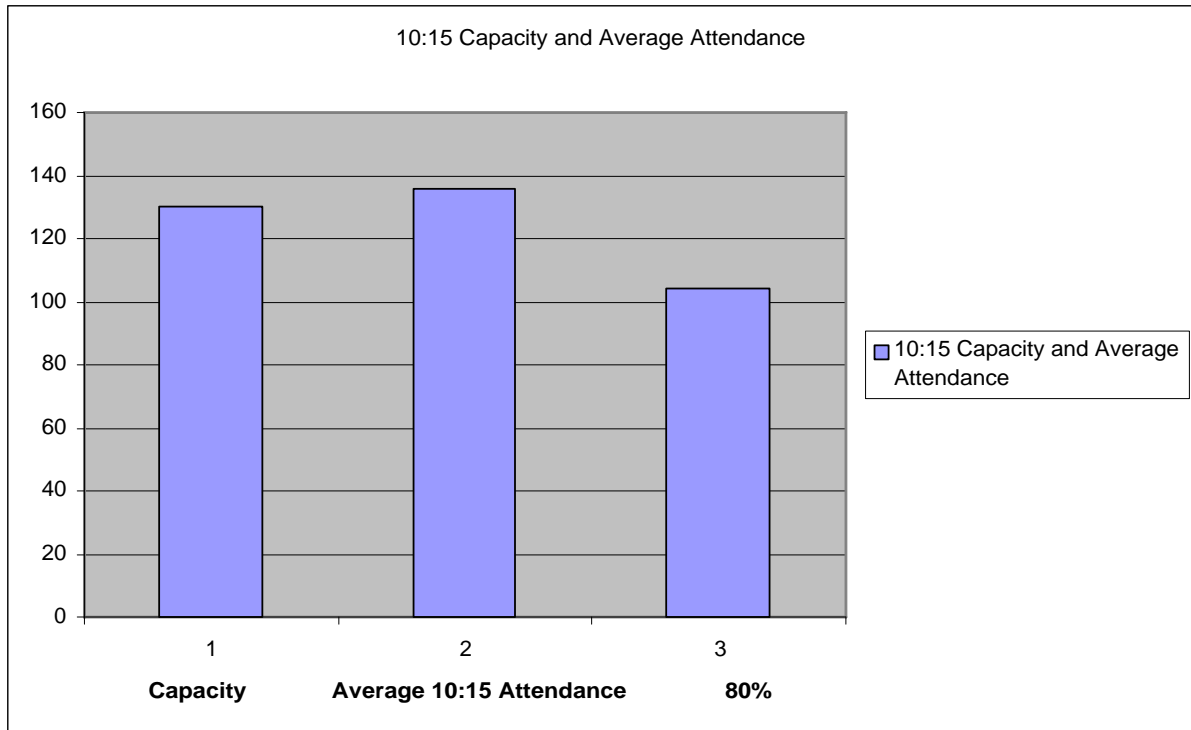


In real terms this looks like a multi staff parish with lots of events and activities taking place. Finances are always an issue. Are we there yet?

In 2003 there were two Sunday worship opportunities at 8:30 and 10:00 while in 2008 much of the year had the added option of a 9:15 liturgy between the 8:15 and 10:15 liturgies. The 9:15 worship is something old, back to our roots, in that it makes use of the original worship space of this building and also something new in that it is in a new format and style of *Eucharist in the Round*. I should say a word about seating capacity. One of the realities of having a third Sunday worship opportunity is that we have a bit more breathing room at the 10:15 liturgy. The capacity of the worship area using the "industry standards" (that is 36" or about a metre per worshipper) is about 130 people. In 2008 our AVERAGE attendance over the entire year at the 10:15 liturgy alone was 136 people. The numbers speak for themselves.

For a modern parish to welcome new people to come in, to be outreaching to its community, there needs to be at least 20% of seats open (that is 80% full) so families

can come in and sit together. Our cramped quarters are the practical reason we have to be radically welcoming! The spiritual reason is that God calls on us to welcome each and every person who comes through the doors as Jesus himself!



John Stoneman recently gave me a fascinating publication by the United Way. There is much of interest in it but one thing stands out. In the census tracts of Canada, Markham, our "Markham ranks third in all of Canada for highest proportion of married couples with children." If we are interested in doing outreach the program we need to respond to more than anything else is ministry to children. As I have said before the business of Markham is children. We need volunteers to join in the ministry and outreach of Sunday School. As President Obama said on Dr Martin Luther King Jr Day (Jan 19/09) , "If we are waiting for someone else to do it. Then.... it's not going to get done." It is great to do things far away but God calls us to welcome and reach out here! The mission field is Markham. The mission field is on the other side of this glass! We are called to plant the good seed of Grace! Are we there yet?

The adding of the 9:15 liturgy gives us a new opportunity to reach out with something different in our community. It also frees up space so we can invite more folk to come in and share in the life of Grace. We are striving to live and grow Grace fully. I find it astonishing that so much has been accomplished in such a short time! This does not just happen. We owe our thanks to so many people who put themselves out to live out the Gospel in the life of Grace! So much happens though the offerings of our **Time** - making time in a busy world to spend in worship. It is who we are! As Craig Satterlee recently wrote: "I now do not approach worship as either an end in itself or a means to

an end, but as the saving activity of God to which everything else a congregation does points and from which everything else a congregation does flows." **Talent** - using our God given abilities in the daily life of Grace. **Treasure** - sharing the bounty of God's blessings in challenging times! As I said in my last eNews, YOU make it happen!

I want to say how thrilled I am with our Grace clergy team. Edmund, Janet, Ted, and Don are a diverse and exciting team to work with. We look forward to Fr. Don's Ordination to the priesthood this spring; I am delighted that Don's ordination will be here at Grace on Sunday, April 26th! Our day time Bible Study continues and we are retrying the parent tot drop in; and *Eating the Scroll* independent Bible study branches out into the Old Testament this Lent; and there are movie nights to name just a few of the offerings! We are blessed in the diversity and gifts of our clergy team!

What a great team of Churchwardens we have with Mike, Carol, Cindy, and Carolyn and our emeritus Dave. We meet regularly and cover so much ground in those meetings. We celebrate God's blessings in this place! I want to say a special word of thanks to Carol who completes her term today and Dave who has stepped in for the last half of the year when personal circumstances made it impossible for Terry to continue. Carol we are going to miss you so much on the leadership team. You have brought not only your talents and expertise to the table but you have brought your enthusiasm. Several years ago Carol said, "Just because we have not done it before doesn't mean we can't do it now! Does it?" Wow! And Dave, thank you so much for stepping in with your reason and dedication to use your talents to fill in and make things work when the leadership team found itself so stretched! I have no doubt that the talents of this dedicated pair will continue to make a difference in life at Grace with their faithfulness! Thank you!

I want to thank Anne for her tireless dedication. I would say she has a heart of gold but it is much more precious than that! If we go back to 2003 and then zoom forward to 2009 Anne has a new job. She did not have to go anywhere! Everything changed around her. Just a year ago we started using power point. Now Anne is searching for new graphics! Power point and enews continue to turn Anne's life upside down but we are the church in the 21st Century! Thank you Anne for your faithfulness, dedication, graciousness, and hard work!

I also want to thank Patrick for his energetic and enthusiastic work as our organist and choir director. Patrick continues to inspire us with his playing. The senior choir continue to enrich our worship. Our children's choir adds much to the enthusiasm of our worship and we are grateful to Janet, Mary Lue and the parents for making this possible! Janet, and sometimes Mary Lue or Patrick, along with Chris and Paul and Sam and our weekly choir volunteers continue to provide lively Spirit filled music at our 9:15 a.m. worship! Our servers are great! Jocelyne and our Altar Guild makes sure all is ready to celebrate God's Grace. Our Lay Reader's are fantastic and share in the leadership of virtually every liturgy of the week regardless of the day or time! Our Readers and Chalice bearers are a blessing as they share in the message of Hope, our Lay Anointers call upon us the healing touch of God as does our compassionate Parish Nurse, Jean Hoover. Our Lay Visitors bring hope!

Cathy Toyonaga is a continual gift to our becoming God's children with her vision and hard work as Sunday School Co-ordinator. I want to thank Sherri Krauss for her expansion of our Nursery Program. It is a work in progress. Our mission here in Markham is to reach out and welcome people. We are grateful to Cathy and Sherri and all the Sunday School volunteers!

I want to thank our caretaker Steve for his diligence in the care of our facility. As uses expand so does his care yet again. If you need him just ask him!! We appreciate the dedication of Jean our Envelope Secretary. We are also all grateful for the hard work our treasurer Phyllis! Fantastic job - She was the Herald of glad tidings this past December!

I also want to thank everyone who serves on our many various committees and organizations! There are so many of you that make the programs of Grace run so effectively. There is ACW, Advisory Board, Affordable Housing Committee, our Auditor, the Baden Powell Leaders, the Emergency Preparedness Committee, Jack and the Cemetery Committee, Communications Committee, Facilities Committee - Moses (Ken) brought us water! our *Faithworks* chair Susan, Dave and Dave and the Festival Committee, Finance Committee, Grounds Crew and Gardeners, Health Cabinet, Lunch with Grace, and Outreach Committee, the Nominating Committee, the Prayer Chain, the Screening Team under the direction of Ginny Bidwell, the Winchesters, Mike Fullgraf for his work with the youth, not to mention our power point operators, the Sidespersons and greeters. We owe a great debt of thanks to Beth for her years of leadership in GCNS and our great gratitude to Daniela for her leadership in GCNS today! I also want to specially thank Dave and Rogers and the entire *Living and Growing Grace Fully* Group for their leadership and hard work.

Our hall does not just happen to be set up magically for our 9:15 worship! Special thanks go to Dave Smith and the Altar Guild for the week by week set up! It takes time to build a new congregation and I want to thank you, Cindy, for looking after the coffee each week as Louie and Stevie do for 10:15! Finally, I want to thank Myron and Dave for all their pictures of the Living and Growing life of Grace! Myron has just completed Power Point TNG – The Next Generation - and the pictures are an amazing record of the life we share.

So many people working to build up the Body of Christ in this place and proclaim the Good News of God's love to all! Each is a vital part of the whole. As we celebrate this Sunday we highlight the dedication of so many! The Fourth Gospel has those fabulous words: *And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us.* The "us" are the folks I have just mentioned. It means us! Literally translated the text means God tented among us! At the start of this report we celebrated the blessing we share in this place as the people of God and also asked, Are we there yet?

I think that being the church in the 21st century ties directly into God tenting among us. Being the church today is like pitching a moving tent. We just get it set and God calls us to move. Change is the only constant!

Earlier this month I was struck by Chaplain Don's reflection. He said, Dominican Priest, Albert Nolan states, "Most of us live in the past or the future. We are distracted by what has happened yesterday. Our feelings and our thoughts dwell upon what happened recently or sometimes what happened long ago. We...romanticize the past (the good ole days,") or live in the future, in the world (we) hope to have one day..."

Neither the past nor the future really exists. All we have is this present moment. The energy we spend worrying about the past or imagining what awful things the future holds for us takes away from the passion of the present moment – the moment that we truly have. Some call this "mindfulness." Being mindful of what is happening this very moment and responding in positive and healthy ways. The opening words of the serenity prayer are a helpful tool in assisting us to cope with uncertainty while being present to the here and now:

We have so much to celebrate as we pitch God's moving tent!

God grant us the serenity

To accept the things we cannot change;

Courage to change the things we can;

And the wisdom to know the difference.

Are we there yet?????

Canon John A. Read+
January 25, 2009