

Well, quite the day! Quite the announcement!

Sunday before last, Anna got up and said she had an announcement. You could hear the communal intake of breath, the buzz of expectation ... But it was just to let us know the selection committee was still busy!! Well we knew that! Anyway, today's news is cause for celebration and new expectancy.

[Where are the members of the selection committee? Please stand ... Thank you for your perseverance in this work, for your care for the candidates and your patience in the difficult moments over the last year!]

This morning, our worship feels a bit like the celebration of the announcement of an expected birth. As with the announcement of a pregnancy, though, we celebrate much more today than the fact that a new beginning is expected in August.

Just as the announcement of a baby coming embodies the hope of continuing life and vitality in a family or community, so the announcement of a new ministry carries the hope of this community for ongoing life and vitality as the people of God in this place.

Yes, St. James is moving forward! Babies, new priests, both are signs that we are alive and well and ready for the next step on the journey.

Human mothers, Mother Church – both are honoured because they carry within them the promise of New Life.

Now I admit to feeling reluctant about the life of the Church being taken over by a secular celebration, a "Hallmark Day", Mother's Day.

Then the realist in me whispers: "Graham, don't fight city hall on this one. There is good in this." And I remember that most Christian festivals were at one time secular festivals. So we can baptize this one too!

One thing I wrestle with personally is the sickly-sweet flavour of Mother's Day.

Mother's Day did not begin that way. Ancient Greece and Rome had their celebrations of motherhood. And the modern Mother's Day began with a *Mother's Day Proclamation* written in 1870 by Julia Ward Howe. It was a pacifist reaction to the carnage of the American Civil War and the Franco-Prussian War. Howe believed women should shape their societies at the political level.

*Arise, then, women of this day!*

*Arise, all women who have hearts,  
Whether our baptism be of water or of tears!*

*Say firmly: "We will not have great questions decided by irrelevant agencies,  
Our husbands will not come to us, reeking with carnage, for caresses and applause.  
Our sons shall not be taken from us to unlearn  
All that we have been able to teach them of charity, mercy and patience.  
We, the women of one country, will be too tender of those of another country  
To allow our sons to be trained to injure theirs."*

*From the bosom of the devastated Earth a voice goes up with our own.  
It says: "Disarm! Disarm! The sword of murder is not the balance of justice."  
Blood does not wipe out dishonor, nor violence indicate possession.*

*As men have often forsaken the plough and the anvil at the summons of war,  
Let women now leave all that may be left of home for a great and earnest day of counsel.*

*Let them meet first, as women, to bewail and commemorate the dead.  
Let them solemnly take counsel with each other as to the means  
Whereby the great human family can live in peace,  
Each bearing after his own time the sacred impress, not of Caesar,  
But of God.*

*In the name of womanhood and humanity, I earnestly ask  
That a general congress of women without limit of nationality  
May be appointed and held at someplace deemed most convenient  
And at the earliest period consistent with its objects,  
To promote the alliance of the different nationalities,  
The amicable settlement of international questions,  
The great and general interests of peace.*

Now that's a Mother's Day I can get more excited about!

Nor am I happy with the implication that all our experience of mothers or mothering has been satisfying or full of grace.

Mothers being human, their partners being prone also to express the all-too-human traits of our fallen human natures, we their children often being anything but the paragons of virtue you might expect to spring from a virtuous source, the overly perfect or positive images of all things motherly wears very thin.

There are those of us who may never have known our mothers, or were hurt in our relationships with our mothers. Today may be a painful day for some, mothers and children.

Now the Bible teaches us that to "honour" our parents will be good for us. To honour my mother is to recognize that I will never know her fully; by honouring her, whatever my relationship with her, I also honour the wonder and complexity of my own life.

Think of mothers in all their diversity of personhood and circumstance, all who are involved in the work of mothering.

In the following (in italics) I borrow heavily from Mother's Day prayers written in 2009 by Pam McKenzie for worship at the Church of the Hosannas.

*There are the archetypal mothers: Eve, who, like Adam, is reassuringly full of humanity. In Christian tradition Mary, mother of Jesus, is the model of openness to the will of God.*

*Mother Earth and Mother Church are the sources of our life and well-being.*

*There are mothers awaiting the arrival of a new child, all who care for and support them; and those who are hoping to become pregnant.*

*Some wait for news from lawyers, social workers, adoption workers, and volunteers.*

*Or imagine those meeting a child for the first time, celebrating a birth, an adoption, or a step mothering relationship, and so they embark on a new life together.*

*There are mothers who are unable to care for their children, and other mothering persons who reach out to take their places ... fathers, foster parents, aunts, uncles, cousins, grandparents, friends, neighbours, childcare workers, teachers, educational assistants, personal support workers, and all who provide additional and supportive care for children.*

*Some mothers are forced to struggle in the midst of violence and war, they live in poverty, homelessness, or adversity, and some are mothering through drug abuse, disability, physical or mental illness - in themselves, their children, or their families.*

*There are mothers isolated from support because of their choices or circumstances.*

*Some are working hard to reconcile society's often conflicting beliefs about the value of paid and unpaid work and who is best equipped to care for young children.*

*Then there are the very young mothers, single mothers, lesbian mothers, mothers in abusive relationships, those for whom the arrival of a child has not felt like a blessing, those whose childlessness feels like a blessing withheld, women who have had abortions, women facing censure or condemnation because they have chosen not to be mothers.*

*And we are mindful today of mothers without their children, and children without their mothers, mothers of infertility, miscarriage and stillbirth, mothers and children who live with estrangement, uncertainty, and worry, and those who grieve.*

Our world is more complicated than the simple story of family harmony. We know that, and we cannot help but bring that reality into our worship today. God does not expect that we be perfect, only that we rely on this Good News, that we are children of God and that God dwells with us reliably in every circumstance of our lives.

The story of our church family is complex too, with many sub-texts that probably do not fit the perfect template. But God calls us as we are, thank goodness!

We now expect a new beginning at St. James. There will be excitement, anticipation and preparation. And so there should be.

Like your mother, though, Gary Nicolosi is a human being. We must refrain from expecting a too highly exalted soul. Like your mother, he will bring his humanity into his relationship with you. He can do no other. Expect nothing more or less from him. Look forward to it. As with your mother, there will be times when he will nurture and care for you as you might expect, and there will be moments when he will disappoint you. That is the paradoxical gift of our humanity.

I would encourage you to pray today for mothers, honouring your relationship with your own mothers – in gratitude and love, or in penitence or to seek reconciliation and a sense of peace where perhaps there has been no peace in you. Pray too for your own role as a mothering person.

In the same vein, please begin to pray today for Gary Nicolosi, soon to be your new rector. Pray that together you will listen deeply to one another and to the community which this church lives to serve. Pray that together you will be servants of New Life in Jesus Christ and that God's Good News will be made known in new ways here in Wortley Village.

May it be so. Amen.