

Rector's Report 2000

Church and Community: St George's at the beginning of the 21st century.

Our celebrations of the 200th anniversary of the round church are variously describe throughout this annual report. As part of the celebrations a series of six historical lectures was given in the fall. I was privileged to give the final talk in what turned out to be an outstanding series of presentations. My contribution was to be a discernment of the present character of the parish and an indication of its future. I hope that all parishioners will read the following summary of that presentation, and bring their reflections to the Annual Meeting on 25 February 2001.

My report has four parts: First, an initial profile of both church and community as they developed in the 20th century. Second, in general terms, my interpretation of the present vision that the parish holds of its desired relationship to the neighbourhood. Third, I touch on several current obstacles to achieving our vision. Fourth, I suggest the way forward in practical terms.

I. Initial Profile of Both Church and Community

a. Saint George's parish in the 20th century

The history of St. George's parish in the 20th century is typical of many North American mainline denomination "downtown" churches. The first half of the 20th century was a busy time for many such churches: large congregations and Sunday Schools, established choirs, and sometimes extensive ministries. During the course of the second half of the 20th century the situation changed dramatically. Population shifts and the gutting of established institutions in downtown areas meant that the traditionally white "old line" urban congregations had lost most of their former members.

A flavour of the first 40 years of the 20th century might be gleaned through the memorial given to the Reverend Henry Ward Cunningham at the end of his ministry at St. George's, 1900-37. The first part reads:

Beloved Rector. For nearly four decades you have been our Pastor and Rector. During the years from 1900 to 1937, you have ministered to the spiritual needs and, in large measure also, to the social needs of a congregation by no means parochial. Yet you have held in your flock even the third and fourth generation of families who were members of St. George's Congregation when you became Rector thirty-seven years ago.

At the turn of the Century our City of Halifax, which had from its foundation been a military and naval outpost of the British Empire, was casting off the old and putting on the new. So too St. George's! Although in large measure it had retained its pristine appearance architecturally yet the ranks of parishioners were moving to houses in newer parts of the City. And whereas Victorian peace and quiet had prevailed during the time of your predecessors, you, dear Rector, have been called upon to guide and direct your congregation through a period of strain and stress unprecedented.

The trials and vicissitudes following upon the cessation of the military capitulation, the desolation and devastation at the time of the Great Explosion, 1917, had their counterpart in the triumph of the Laymen's Missionary Movement and in the Thanksgiving at the Rededication of Church and Organ to the Service of God. Through these incidents, you led us, transcendent!...

In this memorial the population shift away from the neighbourhood is noted already, yet within the context of a thriving and healthy congregation. A second wave of Newfoundlanders made its way to Halifax and St. George's around the war years 1938-1945 and this history of the parish from that time until now is still living memory for a few parishioners.

The population shift away from this neighbourhood gained momentum from 1950-1980. Saint George's survived, but just barely. This segment of our recent history is part of a broader trend of many churches throughout North America which found themselves no longer "downtown", but in the "inner city" or "urban core". Many were forced to close and the building sold to house

restaurants or other businesses. Some mainline church buildings were purchased by independent urban congregations that lacked the economic base to build a church building. Many were merely boarded up and left to crumble for lack of anyone to pay the bills. Some remained open, serving a small, elite membership, by the philanthropy of a wealthy member. St. George's fell into the category of those churches who struggled through a strategy of deferred building maintenance, low salaries, and financial support from the denomination.

In the early 80's the parish had come to the point that it had significant oil bills that had not been paid, all its buildings were old and in poor repair, and it was indebted to the diocese in the order of \$75,000. The wonder is that the Parish survived at all. In the twenty years before 1980 it was only through the determined leadership of its Rector, Father Hayward Hodder, the untiring work of the Ladies Guild, and the countless hours of labour volunteered by an aging congregation which was skilled in carpentry an innovative in all manner of trades, that this parish miraculously survived. Just barely. But it did.

The 1980's saw the character of the parish change significantly. Father Robert Petite had been university chaplain at Dalhousie-King's in the mid-seventies before becoming rector of the Anglican parish in Antigonish. In 1980 he returned to Halifax and came to St. George's upon the retirement of Father Hodder. I want to note two important shifts in the character of this parish during his ten year leadership. First, his university connections attracted students and faculty to the parish even as Father Petite moved the parish towards a richer and musical tradition. A five year plan was developed and published in 1987 to give stability and direction to these liturgical and musical changes. Second, Father Petite boldly took the parish into the community with his passionate, pastoral and courageous chaplaincy with the community of HIV infected and persons with AIDS.

By the end of the 1980s the viability of the parish was more promising than it had been ten years before. The debt to the diocese had been forgiven and the oil bills were paid. But at the same time, it had accrued new mortgage and other debt of \$185,000, mostly for improvements and repairs to the round church. And Father Petite's ministry to the AIDS community was not without controversy within the parish. After he resigned to undertake further study in Chicago, the decade closed with a search for a new rector.

Today, in 2000, the parish profile might read as follows:

"Traditional Anglican parish; a small worshipping congregation; exclusive BCP worship; award winning liturgical choir; full choral worship on major Saints days; church designated as a national Historic Site in 1994; restored church awaiting delivery of Letourneau tracker organ; mission focused on congregation including weekly Soup Kitchen and Community Youth Outreach."

A small congregation with significant buildings to repair and maintain. Viability remains an urgent issue for this parish.

b. Our neighbourhood in the 20th century

In 1945 the Halifax Civic Planning Commission issued a report titled The Master Plan for the City of Halifax, but the actual blueprint for action appeared in the influential 1957 follow-up report, authored by an 'outside expert', Gordon Stephenson, Professor of Town and Regional Planning at the University of Toronto.¹ This led to "urban renewal" through the demolition of the working-class residential area between Cogswell and Duke Streets, and its replacement by Scotia Square. At the time of the Report (1957) Gottingen Street was still a thriving commercial strip (second only to Barrington Street in the City), although a pocket of poverty was concentrated around the Creighton and Maynard Street areas. Of the 13,000 people who lived in this area, 2000 were African Nova Scotians. The average wage/salary was less than 2/3 of the average

¹ Gordon Stephenson, A Redevelopment Study of Halifax, Nova Scotia (Halifax, NS: City of Halifax, 1957)

wage/salary in Halifax. In 1965, Miss Marjorie Cook, director of special services for the Halifax School Board, explained that school attendance was adversely affected because of that poverty. "Unskilled jobs are less available than they were, and the money they bring in has not kept pace with rising costs of living. As a result, there is little food in the house, often no money for clothing. Again and again, we find that little children have no shoes."²

By the mid-seventies the programme of urban renewal had taken its toll. Even with the construction of several large senior high rises, and the influx of many African Nova Scotians into public housing in Uniacke Square and Mulgrave Park, the population of the North End was reduced by 43% between 1961 and 1976. Enrollment at North End Schools fell by as much as 75% and several closed.

The decline of both Gottingen and Barrington Street began soon after the beginning of the 1957 urban renewal. Eaton's, for example, moved its downtown store to the new shopping centres in the West End. The concentration of low income families in the area and the development of new shopping centres elsewhere in the City, meant less money to spend at neighbourhood stores. Social stigma attached to public housing kept people with money away from the north end. The opening of Scotia Square adversely affected Gottingen Street shops. All of the bank branches, as well as the local supermarket, closed. Even telephone booths were removed from the area because of repeated vandalism. Gottingen Street was transformed from a street which provided a full range of services to one dominated by social service agencies: made necessary because of what this neighbourhood has been allowed, or some would say, encouraged to become.

But apart from the general drift into becoming one of the most disadvantaged economic urban cores east of Montreal, the character of our neighbourhood can only be understood if we are sensitive to the specific history of African Nova Scotians. Their identity with this neighbourhood was strengthened by the public housing which was erected after the shame of the expropriation of 77 families from Africville. There is a long and sometimes bitter history in this province, going back at least as far as the arrival of the loyalists (Between 1782 and 1785 2,300 black Loyalists along with 1,200 black slaves of white Loyalists, arrived in N.S.), and part of their history is how they were often denied the very basic right to dignity, respect, employment and education equal to that which whites enjoyed. That historic injustice cannot be undone, but it must be recognized and acknowledged. Our differences, including our unique histories, must be affirmed, shared and celebrated, whenever appropriate. We must all acknowledge the racism of the past and present, which is part of the heritage of all Caucasian Nova Scotians, especially those with deep roots in the province.

Thus we can only appreciate our neighbourhood if we are aware of the specific histories of the great diversity of persons who live, work and 'hang out' here. In addition to the African Nova Scotians, our neighbourhood is defined by so many other 'peoples'.

Many homeless persons find their way here. These are they who at one time or other might have found a welcome place in a nursing home or a mental institution; or who find themselves homeless because of borderline personality traits or lifestyles; or who find themselves homeless because of a combination of lost jobs, marriage breakdowns, welfare benefit cuts, chronic depression, drug addictions, wrong choices, lack of personal support; or those who have a room in a boarding house somewhere but are really without a stable place to live because they cannot afford a reasonable apartment. This is a city where the vacancy rate is so low that with the economy steadily improving with oil and gas development, landlords can ask what they want and the homeless remain homeless.

A significant number who live here are on Social Assistance. Many of these families have to make tough decisions in the winter months of 'meat or heat'.

² Negroes, Whites and Churches in Halifax

Some live in one of the two half way houses in the neighbourhood, as they attempt to make the adjustment from prison to society.

There are the working poor. Consider those single moms and sometimes dads who work themselves to exhaustion at their jobs and at home, trying to keep the school interest up and have their children in all the right programmes for their social development, until their school aged son or daughter gets sick and has to stay home and there is no one else to be with them and the mom's employer could care less that she has a personal crisis at home and insists that she show up or her job is gone.

There are those with financial stability who live here because they really like this neighbourhood.

All our neighbours cringe with fear when drug dealers make the streets unsafe and good young people are enticed into the drug world. The fear of gunfire is real in parts of this neighbourhood as is the fear that your children or your grandchildren might hear that sound of gunfire and not forget.

Some of our neighbours are addicted to street drugs, or caught up in the sex trade, in a lifestyle which is destroying them but which they despise with every fibre and nerve of their body and soul.

Many of our neighbours live elsewhere but spend much of their daily life here, either because it is here they find the care and resources they need, or because they come to gather in communities of choice (church congregations, for example) or care, service or solidarity with those who hurt in some way or other.

Our neighbours include those community leaders who are taking serious and positive steps to a renewal and redevelopment of this neighbourhood (clearly seen in the proposed Creighton-Gerrish Street development).

Some of our neighbours come here to fix up places and restore houses of character, and to be part of a community of like minded persons who are doing the same.

This neighbourhood is not static. It is on the move. It's character has shifted dramatically in the last fifty years and the next decades promise to be equally dynamic. It is a culturally rich and diverse neighbourhood of many communities moving in relation to one another.

II Our Present Vision

Since 1990 the following statement has appeared in our bulletin almost every week:

"In response to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Parish of Saint George offers a unique combination of traditional Anglican Worship and a commitment to Inner-City Ministry. Open to the community which surrounds it, Saint George's dares to be shaped by the Inner City, yet seek to transform our neighbourhood by preaching, in Word and action, the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Come join us in worship, fellowship and outreach ministry."

Our 200 in 2000 anniversary theme was that of Loving God and Loving Neighbour. Indeed, this biblical two-fold focus, recited as at the summary of the law at the beginning of the service of Holy Communion in the Anglican Book of Common Prayer, has defined the worshipping congregation here for the past decade.

After the fire of June 1994 the congregation was given six months to prepare a plan for the future of the parish, to be presented to the Bishop and his committee for consideration in the second week of January 1995. Advent, 1994, was a concentrated time of praying, group discussion, sharing and plenary sessions in the parish. "What is God calling us to do?" Many options were considered, and at the final public session before we voted as a congregation whether to propose restoration or not, many parishioners spoke. Almost all spoke in favour of restoration, but many of these parishioners share how they had been convinced, at one stage or another, that restoration was not the best decision. What brought most of them eventually to prefer restoration was the

simple recognition that his parish had been part of this neighbourhood for two hundred and forty eight years at that time, and it would be a terrible judgment for the Anglican Church and Saint George's Parish to fold up its tents and walk away from our neighbours. We had been here since 1756 and were convinced that our presence in this neighbourhood has a purpose. Not to rebuild was seen to be the real decision that the parish was considering - to abandon a neighbourhood after growing with it since its very inception. To restore and stay here was the natural, though seemingly impossible, thing to attempt because of this rootedness here in this community.

Part of our fundraising case to the general public was our commitment to the people of this neighbourhood and our willingness to contribute to positive community development.

A significant attempt to solidify an action plan which would guide our deepening involvement in the neighbourhood was ratified at the 1997 Annual Meeting. The Pastoral Ministry Committee proposed a strategy and plan for the development of an approach which would try help us become better neighbours. We wanted to be thoughtful about our relationship to the neighbourhood and avoid destructive attitudes of "do goodery" (as Father Kenneth Leech called it.) We were enthusiastic about the whole notion of "capacity building" (i.e. seeing our congregation and our neighbourhood not in terms of 'needs' but of 'potentials'), and coming alongside our neighbours to enable and facilitate their gifts. We knew we had as much to receive as we had to give, and that the development of relationships of mutual joy and support was the only way to achieve our desire to contribute to the health of our neighbourhood. We were also excited that a sustainable parish support team might evolve which would pray for one another's ministries in the neighbourhood, and which would help the whole parish to reflect on each proposed neighbourhood initiative so that we did not unintentionally fall into the trap of ministering to the "needs" of others rather than establishing offers of friendships to persons. The Annual Meeting gave us the green light to go ahead and to develop such an approach which would guide our future efforts in the neighbourhood. It looked as if we were turning a corner.

Finally, we cannot talk about our vision of the relation of church and neighbourhood without acknowledging the centrality of worship for our parish, even in our 'outreach' or 'inreach'. Our relation to one another and to the neighbourhood must be a natural and urgent extension of our worship and praying together. If we do not meet our neighbour in our worship and in our praying, somehow our worship and praying is too facile and must go deeper. The whole Christian religion is about God coming alongside us in His humility as incarnate Son, and being born in us. The exaltation of our human nature to become sons and daughters of God depends first upon recognizing His humility and allowing His divinity to draw us to the Father. In our worship we must come to recognize the poverty of Christ and thus acknowledge our own poverty and need of grace. When this happens in worship, we meet our neighbour who is in any type of poverty, within ourselves and we become one in solidarity with him or her. Conversely, if our lives are centred in Christian worship, when we meet our neighbour who is in any type of poverty, we do not draw back, because we have learned to recognize in that person both Christ and our own self. Thus we love God and neighbour, and our neighbour as ourself.

But if the language of our 'vision' sounds a bit pious and theoretical, let us come down to earth on the corner of Brunswick and Cornwallis Streets. Our way forward must face the realities of our situation. I want now to speak candidly and honestly about our present situation before concluding with some personal thoughts about the future of St. George's in this neighbourhood.

III Current Obstacles and Challenges to achieving our Vision

a. Obstacles and Challenges to achieving our Vision from within Church

Within the parish itself there are considerable obstacles to becoming 'good neighbours' and positively involved in the development of our neighbourhood. I shall list a few:

1. The reality is that we are such a small parish and of the eighty or so active families/individuals, not all are able or prepared to give time, energy or resources to community outreach here in this neighbourhood. There are many different types of people who join our parish for equally different reasons. Some join the congregation because their lives are already overly busy with work, family

commitments and volunteer activities. These people discover at Saint George's a spiritual life which is able to refocus and sustain them. These parishioners pray deeply for our neighbourhood, but are already over committed to a life of service to others in their workplace, with their friends, and in volunteer work.³ And since most parishioners do not reside in this neighbourhood, the natural extension of love of neighbour which follows from their worship experience is practiced elsewhere.

It soon became clear that those who were initially enthusiastic about establishing the pastoral outreach team mentioned above were too committed to other parish work, or insisted on carry on their individual work in the community without need or burden of being part of a supportive team, or did not feel able to come together with others for this common work. Our inability to sustain such a neighbourhood support team has had huge implications on our outreach. Youth workers, for example, have felt isolated and alone. Others attempting to develop ministries of one sort or another fail to generate support from others and interpret this as non-caring. Some have decided to carry on ministries, but have refused to allow that it is part of the work of the parish, because they are distressed and angry at the apparently lack of support. It has been difficult to develop a sense of supporting one another in neighbourhood/community activity.

2. For many reasons, some historical, few neighbourhood persons worship here regularly. This in itself is an obstacle to our getting to know our neighbours.

3. Our church building is locked during the day. True, we have services at least three times every day, Morning Prayer, Noonday prayers, Evening Prayer, and Holy Communion on many weekdays. But, again, few of our neighbours come to these times of prayer. And the rest of the time neighbours cannot enter our beautiful church for quiet, prayer, reflection.

During the restoration process, however, we made sure that the doors throughout the church were keyed so that the building could be safely and usable by community groups. Access to the upper gallery and basement and to all but one washroom can be controlled for building safety and security. In this way we attempted to make our round church more neighbourly and inviting. So far it hasn't happened yet.

5. Our parish hall is locked on weekdays because we have no staff other than the rector. YouthNet has had a full time Director for more than a year now, but that work is largely funded by sources external to the parish and this work is specific to youth. This means that when folk in need, wanting information, or even wanting help, come along, there are no "open hours" that they know they can speak to someone. Yes, various parish groups meet in the hall during the week, but these groups cannot be expected to respond to visitors coming to the door, on behalf of the parish. We have attempted to find people in the parish to volunteer, but it is very hard to find people who are capable of relating appropriately to the many types and profiles of persons who come knocking on our door, or who are not at work through the day when our need is greatest.

6. Our small congregation is striving for bottom line sustainability. I am speaking only of just keeping the doors of the church open so worship can take place, maintaining the hall where parish and community events take place, and keeping up the other two buildings, the Rectory and the Sexton's cottage, which are now rented out. The rector is the only staff person at present. It will be a challenge for us to maintain even this level of ministry unless our congregation grows. To understand this means a quick comparison with other churches in the neighbourhood.

³ Of course, those who come to Saint George's to worship cannot help but be aware of the great need in the neighbourhood, and sometimes their inability to get involved in the neighbourhood work creates an unbearable contradiction which they are not able to bear. Parishioners who are constantly told of the countless opportunities to help others in this neighbourhood may become burdened with guilt and sometime leave the congregation because of it.

St. Patrick's Roman Catholic church has a small congregation, but they receive direct funding from their archdiocese whereas we receive none from our diocese. As well, the St. Vincent de Paul Society located on site has substantial endowments and other financial resources. The St. Vincent de Paul Society sponsors the work of Hope cottage, including its full time paid staff; the publishing and staff of the newspaper Street Feat, written and sold by those who are homeless or unemployed; a full time fieldworker who has an office at Turning Point men's shelter; and they have the financial resources to assist those who approach them who are needy in different ways.

Brunswick Street United Church is another church which is entirely different in how its community work is sponsored. Since the 1960s they have engaged in community outreach - Christian Education, summer camps, neighbourhood youth groups, the clothing centre - but most of the money and resources that pay staff, support programmes etc. come from United Church mission funds, government funding and other external grants.

St. George's is very different from these two neighbouring churches in that all of the funding for the maintenance of building, worship and outreach (with the exception of YouthNet), comes from its small congregation. Indeed, the congregational offerings are taxed fully 21% by the Diocese of Nova Scotia to support the work of the diocesan and national church. We have a parish hall which requires in excess of one half million dollars to put it in good repair, a Rectory building which requires major and expensive work, another building in poor shape, and a restored church which is a national historic site requiring regular and heritage-standard maintenance. All of these buildings must be maintained and operated. Then there is the stipend of the rector to provide for priestly ministry of worship, chaplaincy and pastoral care. Our small parish is overburdened even before any thought is given to outreach in the neighbourhood or contributing to positive community development.

b. Obstacles and Challenges to achieving our vision, from the community

There are also significant factors from the community which must honestly be acknowledged if we are to achieve our vision.

1. The burden of place - we worship in a beautiful church building. Sure, those in the neighbourhood who know us can see beyond the eloquent building, but to the many who do not know us, and even to many who do, and I know even to some of the pastors in our neighbourhood churches, we look for all the world to still be the "Church of England"- powerful, rich, privileged, snobbish, independent and stand-offish. Today, none of these things may be true, but they are still perceived to be true.

2. The burden of place - the myth of the slave gallery. During the time of restoration, it was only when I was asked about it at a Cornwallis Street Baptist church function that I realized that this was still a very powerful and negative myth for some in this community. This happened to be the second time I had been at that church within three or four months and at the previous visit I had also been asked about it. At that time I explained that we were not replacing the 'slave gallery' because there had never been one. I thought nothing more about it until a second visit to the Cornwallis Baptist church when two of the elders of the church, in a very friendly manner, asked me about it again. It was more along the lines of an incredible "You're not putting that 'slave gallery' back are you?" They were quite serious and even perhaps passionate about the question. They had heard about the shackles and the chains which were still to be found up there before the fire. This time I was disturbed, for it seemed in some way that the myth was about the present as well as the past.

And this is not a myth only in the African Nova Scotian community. I can remember that soon after the fire a parishioner was speaking to a bishop in a large city not in the Atlantic region. The one bit of information about the round church known by the bishop was that it had a slave gallery. Indeed, when the Primate preached here at a regional Evensong (before the fire) he mentioned it. And at a recent parish council meeting this past year, one of the members of parish council and a

long standing parishioner, spoke of the slave gallery and the shackles which could still be seen there within living memory.

I mention this myth only because it tells us something about how we are perceived by the outside community, and especially is it significant for the perception of at least some in the African Nova Scotian community. We are seen as having not left behind and separated ourselves from our imperialistic, racist and privileged past. These are hard words, and difficult to speak, but we will be best to change this perception by acknowledging its existence.

This myth fits in with the broader perception of our community profile as a privilege and powerful congregation, which is an obstacle to the willingness of people to allow us to come alongside them in friendship. They are intimidated by our appearance and by our apparent wealth and education. They are overwhelmed and perhaps "put off" by our apparent success and influence. From the standpoint of our neighbours taking the initiative to befriend us and come to be with us, we appear "unapproachable." From the standpoint of our pastoral outreach to them and our attempts to befriend them, their perception of us often makes it difficult to proceed from "sympathy to solidarity."

Our relation to community and our potential to achieve our vision of neighbourliness is affected by how we are perceived by the wider community, by our neighbourhood, and by groups within our neighbourhood.

IV The way forward: Overcoming obstacles; meeting challenges; living our vision

Parishioners reading this may well be annoyed that thus far I have been far too negative in my assessment of our parish's relation to its neighbourhood. I have not at all given an objective description of the parish such that an outsider might gain a thorough and fair picture of its present character. There are many heartwarming and positive indications that this parish has made significant steps towards solidarity and neighbourliness. The Shining Lights neighbourhood street choir recorded and released their CD in the Round Church; The Black Heritage Month 2001 had its opening event here in January 2001; the parish has hosted four annual Stepping Stone Christmas Dinners for programme user, children and families; YouthNet has touched the lives of many neighbourhood children who have, in turn, touched our lives even more deeply; the good work of the Soup Kitchen has carried on for fifteen years, and so on.

But in spite of these positive activities, I want to challenge us to adopt a common understanding of our relation to our neighbourhood so that with confidence we might more effectively play our unique role in its development. It is time to talk about our commitment and approach to our neighbourhood. Let me offer what I see to be the way forward for our parish.

1. We must stand with the other churches in the neighbourhood to make sure that the future development of this neighbourhood remains humane and positive.

As in other cities throughout North America, our inner city neighbourhood will become a more popular and attractive place to live for middle class individuals and families. The recent changes to the bridge approaches should significantly encourage the residential development of Brunswick Street and Gottingen Street in this direction. The proposed changes to the Cogswell Street interchange will further encourage this move.

Saint George's should take its place with other churches in facilitating a responsible and continuing dialogue and consultation with all the stakeholders in the development of this area. There has already been considerable reflection about the economic and social future of this neighbourhood, but I fear the conversations have been too limited in scope. There are many highly organized and focused groups such as the Gottingen Street Business Association and the Downtown Halifax Business Commission; the Waterfront Development Corporation; several African Nova Scotia community groups; the First Nations presence in the Friendship Centre; and

organized residential groups in Brunswick Street, Uniacke Square and Mulgrave Park areas. But the dialogue and development planning should also include groups which represent those who are most marginalized and politically powerless, such as the Community Advocates Networks, Anti-Poverty network, Child-care providers, etc. this broad-based discussion must be led by a non-partisan group and I can see no better potential leader in this than the North End Council of Churches which is committed to the well-being of all the present and future residents of this neighbourhood. The gentrification of like neighbourhoods through the western world has much to teach us about how not to proceed. We still have time to do things right and to build up this neighbourhood with a healthy balance of residential, commercial and institutional development. We have many things in our favour including the measured pace at which our neighbourhood is likely to evolve, and the abundance of space to accommodate all levels of social stratification as well as our culturally rich ethnic communities. We need housing for all sorts of people and we need more homeowners. But there is every reason to be confident that if we are both careful and bold, this neighbourhood will achieve social and economic renewal for all its residents in the coming decades.

2. Saint George's must become more aware of its potential for upstream ministry. I do not know the real etymology of this term, but I have in my mind the image of a missionary who started to receive wounded persons down river, and would care for them. She became more fatigued as time went on because the wounded continually increased in number. Finally, one day she decided to go upstream and find out what was causing the wounds: when she saw what was happening she pitched her tent and remained upstream, determined to work to stop the cause of the injuries. Of course there is a need for caring persons both upstream and downstream, each doing good in different ways. At Saint George's we shall always be privileged to assist in the actual healing of whoever comes to us, and several parishioners are deeply involved in coal-faced downstream ministry, but our parish is ill-suited, at least at the moment to make downstream bandaging our primary focus. On the other hand, our present congregational profile makes us well-suited for important upstream ministry. One of the simple ways to exercise this type of ministry is by serving as a board or committee member of one of many significant organizations here, such as the North End Clinic, Stepping Stone, St Joseph's Children's Centre, the Community Advocates Network, the Inner City Education Advisory Committee, and the Mainline Needle Exchange to name a few.

Upstream ministry also means becoming articulate about the issues on the street and advocating for fair and just government policy. It will make a difference in the setting of public policy in this city and province if people of influence begin to speak out and show that they too are taking notice of how government cares for the most vulnerable in our society.

We are well suited at Saint George's to engage in upstream ministry on behalf of this neighbourhood in the first quarter of this new century. We must become more aware and involved in the setting of public policy which is fair to those who have little influence in the political process.

3. The way forward for this particular parish is to let our neighbours come to know us in all our uniqueness and peculiarities. We must become better at inviting our neighbours to come worship with us and we must become more welcoming of neighbourhood families. We are an odd bunch and ought not to hide it. Our parish is committed to a very specific type of spiritual life which might call 'classical Anglicanism'. These days it is not to be found in very many places in the Christian world anywhere. Those who attend this parish are convinced that it is a faithful way to live the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This specific spirituality leads us to a form of worship which is primarily poetic and contemplative in a manner quite foreign to most other Anglican churches today.

We must beware of a condescending attitude which would maintain that persons in poverty, on the street or working class cannot find deep meaning in poetry, liturgical language or in music which is centuries old, sung devoutly by a choir. I believe that persons who find themselves in severe circumstances of poverty are very capable of a holy imaginative life which is nourished by exposure to beauty, art, music, poetry and vision. Such a life is possible at Saint George's parish.

Dr. Margaret Casey tried to teach us this in the simple note she sent the day after the fire. Margaret Casey was a champion for those who found themselves most vulnerable and dispossessed in this neighbourhood - physician at the North End Clinic for many years. She encouraged us to do everything we could to restore the round church because of the necessity for roses as well as bread in all our lives. I saw her two and a half years later at a graveside. In our chatting I started to list some of the things Saint George's was beginning to do in the neighbourhood, probably thinking that that would please her. In a kind way she reminded me that the very beauty of this church and the loveliness of our worship helps create the goodness which IS this neighbourhood.

4. Although we are struggling financially to survive as a parish, because we are presently without debt (Though just barely) and not dependent upon external church, corporate or government funding, we are free to remain non-competitive and collaborative in our relation with neighbouring churches. In essence this freedom means that we can give ourselves entirely to strengthening our neighbourhood through existing community programmes and initiatives. Although our hall is used for youth activities each weekday, we are not required to create programmes and recruit numbers of 'programme users' to justify the continued receiving of grants for programmes. Indeed, even our youth mentoring initiative (the sole parish activity dependent upon external funding) is committed to the 'capacity building' of this neighbourhood. Our most successful efforts have been to enhance the music and choral programmes at our two neighbourhood schools, and to provide volunteers for the North Branch Library Tutoring Programme - neither programme is based on site.

5. We must not apologize for living in a beautiful church building, but open its doors to the neighbourhood. Although we are responsible for its care and maintenance, this building does not belong to use but to the community. When the dome was being built out here on the parking lot we encourage neighbourhood children to draw and paint pictures on the timber legs, and to sign their names so that they might always think that this church bears a bit of their imagination. All the alterations made to the round church during the restoration were to make it more available and useful for community recitals, concerts, rehearsals, neighbourhood and school drama, etc. Every form of artistic and creative expression is God-given and appropriate for this God-centred sanctuary. We must encourage in every way the use of this building by this neighbourhood and the wider community until it is seen not only to be a community gathering place, but also a place where community is created and neighbours come to know one another better. We currently provide ten free tickets for distribution in the neighbourhood for every event that takes place here, symbolic of our desire that this neighbourhood never be nor feel excluded from what goes on here.

6. We must begin to tell our own story better.

i. We must tell that the Round Church was restored fully to its former glory because we didn't have a choice to reduce the scale or design. The Parish itself had no money to construct a smaller structure even if we had wanted to. The choice was either to mobilize the government and heritage community to restore the round church and continue our mission here, or to withdraw from the area. Every other option was considered and found to be impossible.

ii. We must tell that we engaged in the tireless struggle to restore this church because we believed in this neighbourhood.

iii. We must let others know that we are a very small congregation struggling to continue as a witness to the Love of Christ.

Conclusion

The best way to contribute to the development of our neighbourhood is by continuing to be true to our worship and commitment to the spiritual life promoted by the Prayer Book Tradition. We have been here in this neighbourhood for almost 250 years, and we belong here. It is true that in the past few decades perhaps we have grown apart from our neighbours, but we are neighbours nonetheless. We must begin to act more like the neighbours we are. We must eagerly invite our neighbours to discover our hospitality and welcome them to share our worship and find out about

the spiritual life that is so meaningful to us. In return, we must make every effort to join our neighbours in their various walks and circumstances.

We are more the same than different from our neighbours. Whether affluent or poor, white or black or yellow, we share a common Father in Heaven who wants us to know how much we are loved. I believe that we don't have a lot to offer to our neighbours other than ourselves, our worship and our spiritual life. But surely that is enough.

Indeed, that we have little to offer in terms of financial resources and helping programmes is perhaps a good thing. Empty handed is perhaps the way forward in the living of our vision. Empty handed and eager to receive from the other, rather than be quick to give. Empty handed because we've come to recognize our own poverty. We know that we are not the elite trying to decide how best to give to our neighbour, but rather how best to receive from our neighbour. As Jean Vanier tells those who come to work at his L'Arche homes for people with developmental disabilities:

You come to L'Arche because wanted to serve the poor; but you will stay in L'Arche if you discover you are poor. You're not an elite; you're a human person with all the fragility and beauty of a human person, no better than people with disabilities. You're bonded together. The good news is not given those who serve the poor; it is given those who discover they are poor.

It's not just doing things for people but discovering we are changed when we come close to them. If we enter into a friendship with them, they change us. Here we touch a mystery that the person we reject because of prejudice [or fear is the one who heals us].⁴

The Reverend Canon Gary Thorne,
Rector

⁴ Jean Vanier as quoted in the Anglican Journal, December, 2000.