

Introduction

My talk this evening will not be historical, but a looking forward to the future relation of the parish to its surrounding community. I am pleased that it has been prefaced by four splendid, entertaining and informative historical presentations, for as Marx said “it is out of our old history that our new history must be made.” This summer we employed a carpenter around our home who does a lot of renovation and restoration work in old houses around Halifax. He was speaking of a home built around the turn of the century which uncharacteristically had a large walk-in closet. Of the original carpenter who built that house, our carpenter commented: “Whoever did that was a visionary. He had great hindsight!” I hope what I say this evening is not simply idle speculation, but is based upon an understanding of the social history of our parish and a proper discernment of its present character.

Finally, before I begin, I want to acknowledge that our consideration this evening of the emerging relation of church and community is in a year which has been proclaimed a year of Jubilee by churches throughout the world. In this Jubilee year and in the context of this evening’s theme, we remember the words of Christ in Luke 4:18, 19

“The spirit of the Lord is upon me, Because he anointed me to preach good tidings to the poor:

He hath sent me to proclaim release to the captives,

And recovering of sight to the blind,

To set at liberty them that are bruised,

To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.

Initial Profile of Both Church and Community

- a. Church: a sketch of Saint George’s parish today.

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, 1900-1937. I shall read the first part only:

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 the parishioners were moving to houses in the newer parts of the City. And whereas Victorian peace and quiet had prevailed during the times 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!

The population shift 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 the 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 buildings sold to house restaurants or other businesses. Some mainline church buildings were purchased by the 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 wealthy members. St. George's fell into the category of those churches who struggled on through a strategy of deferred building maintenance, low salaries and financial support from the denomination.

In the early 1980's the parish came 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. We must note that our parish survived these difficult years only through the determined leadership of its Rector, The Reverend Hayward Hodder, the untiring work of the Ladies' Gabriel Guild, and the countless hours of labour volunteered by an aging congregation which was skilled in carpentry and innovative in all manner of trades.

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 the parish during his ten-year leadership. First, his university

connections attracted students and faculty to the parish even as Father Petite was easing the parish towards a richer ritual 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 and courageous chaplaincy with the community of HIV infected and persons with AIDS.

By the end of the nineteen eighties the viability of the parish was more promising than it had been ten years before. The debt to the diocese had been forgiven. The oil bills were paid. But at the same time, it had accrued new mortgage and other debt \$185,000, mostly for improvements and repairs to the round church. And Father Petite's chaplaincy 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 in the hope of building on his vision for this parish.

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

Traditional Anglican parish; 80 active families/individuals; 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 congregation including weekly Soup Kitchen and Community Youth Outreach. It would be the phrase "80 active families/individuals" that might catch the eye of an astute reader. Not many. And significant buildings to repair and maintain. Viability remains an urgent issue for this parish.

Community: a sketch of our neighbourhood today.

The title of my lecture this evening leaves me some freedom to define "community". It is possible that the question to be addressed is St. George's relation to society generally, or to the world wherever it might be in need, or to the Metro area, or to this specific "inner city" area bounded by Cogswell St., the commons, North Street and the harbour. This parish has a relation to each of these communities. The wider needs of the world community shape our praying and we contribute resources through The Primate's World Relief and Development Fund, special appeals, and the northern missions through our allotment monies sent to General Synod. Our relation to the wider Metro area is varied, and I hope, positive and significant. But it is the relation of our parish to the present neighbourhood and community in which the church is situated that I wish to explore this evening.

I have already alluded to the changing demographic of these streets during the second half of 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 was contained 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. At the same time a pocket of poverty in Halifax was concentrated around the Creighton and Maynard Street areas. Of the 13,000 people who lived in the area, 2000 were African Nova Scotians. The average wage/salary was less than two thirds of the average 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 the rising cost of living. As a result, there is little food in the house, and 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 a whopping 42% between 1961 and 1976. Enrolment at North End Schools fell by as much as 75%, and several closed.

The decline of both Gottingen and Barrington Streets 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. Every supermarket and bank pulled out of the community. Even telephone booths were removed from the area because of repeated vandalism. Gottingen Street was transformed from one 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 the homes in 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. They often were denied the most basic dignity, respect, employment and education. Those historic injustices cannot be undone, but they must be acknowledged. Our differences, including our unique histories, must be affirmed, shared and celebrated, whenever appropriate. The systemic racism of the past is part of the heritage of all Caucasian Nova Scotians, especially those with deep roots in the province. Part of knowing our neighbourhood is knowing the history of African Canadians with whom we are neighbours.

The neighbourhood also belongs to the homeless – not as “the homeless” but as persons who at one time or another 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. Part of knowing our neighbourhood is knowing those who live on welfare benefits, with children, who have to make tough decisions in the winter months of “meat or heat”

There are two halfway houses in our neighbourhood, whose short-term residents are making every effort to successfully bridge the tremendous societal gap prison to society.

The working poor live in our neighbourhood. There are many single moms and fewer single dads who work themselves to exhaustion at their jobs and at home, trying to keep their children interested in school so they can escape the poverty cycle. These parents do everything they can to involve their children in all the right programmes for their social development. Living on this edge is often just barely possible 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.

Young families and creative couples with financial stability are moving to this neighbourhood to fix up some of the properties and to live in a culturally diverse community.

This neighbourhood is also about residents who regularly hear gunfire which reminds them that drug dealers sometimes make the streets unsafe. Sometimes the most promising young people are enticed into the drug world. Residents are both angered and saddened that their children and grandchildren lie in their beds at night and hear the sound of gunfire.

This is also an accepting and comfortable neighbourhood for those addicted to street drugs, or those who feel caught up in the sex trade in a lifestyle which they realize is destroying them and which they despise with every fibre and nerve of their body and soul.

This is also neighbourhood to many folk who live elsewhere but who spend much of their daily life here, either because it is here they find the care and resources they need, or because they came to gather in communities of choice (church congregations, for example) or because they come everyday to offer some type of care, service or solidarity with those who hurt in some way or other.

Finally, the character of this neighbourhood is enriched by the many community leaders who are taking serious positive steps to a renewal and redevelopment of this neighbourhood (clearly seen in the proposed Creighton-Gerrish Street development).

This neighbourhood is not static. It is on the move. Its 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.

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's offers a 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 seeks 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 is that of Loving God and Loving Neighbour. Indeed, this biblical two-fold focus, recited as the summary of the law at the beginning of the service of Holy Communion in the Book of Common Prayer, has defined the worshipping congregation here for the past decade.

After the fire of June 1994 which caused six million dollars damage to the church building, 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, focusing on the question, "What is God calling us to do?" many options were considered. Many parishioners took the opportunity to speak to the issue at the final public session before we voted as a congregation whether or not to propose restoration to the Bishop. Almost all spoke in favor of restoration, but many of these parishioners shared 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, as I recall, was the simple recognition that this parish had been part of this neighbourhood for two hundred and forty eight years at that time, and it would be a terrible judgement for the Anglican Church and Saint George's parish to be seen 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 our rootedness in this community.

The Bishop did grant his permission for the congregation to attempt to raise the funds for restoration, but only on condition that the ministry of the parish not suffer because of the emphasis on the restoration of the building. In his press release announcing the permission to restore, Bishop Peters counseled that Saint George's must continue to be a "responsible parish whose primary ministry is to people"

From the time of the fire we have had part time and then full time community youth outreach workers. And there seemed to be more and more interest on the part of parishioners in working in the community, with the 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.

The 1997 Annual Meeting encouraged the Pastoral Ministry Committee to formulate a strategy which would truly help the congregation become more fully integrated in the neighbourhood. We were determined to be positive and thoughtful about our relationship to the neighbourhood, avoiding stereotypical and destructive attitudes of “do-goodery”. 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 all our gifts and potentials. 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 truly 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. It was hoped that this community integration team would help the whole parish to reflect on proposed neighbourhood initiatives so that we did not unintentionally fall into the trap of ministering to the “needs” of others rather than establishing offers of friendship to persons.

But we cannot talk about our vision of the relation of church and neighborhood without acknowledging the centrality of worship for our parish, even in our “outreach” or “inreach”. For better or for worse, our relation to one another and to the neighborhood must be a natural and urgent extension of our worship and praying together. If we do not meet our neighbor in our worship and in our praying, somehow our worship and praying is too facile and must go deeper. The Christian religion reveals a compassionate God who comes alongside us in his humility as incarnate Son, and who is born in us. The exaltation of our human nature to become sons and daughters of God depends first on recognizing His humility and allowing His divinity to draw us to the Father. In our worship, we recognize the poverty of Christ which reaches down to us. In worship, we meet our neighbor who is in any type of poverty and we become one in solidarity with him or her. If our lives are centred in Christian worship, when we meet our neighbor who is in any type of poverty we recognize in that person both Christ and our own self. Our vision of “church and community” is grounded in the simple commandment to Love God and neighbor. But more must be said about our present historical situation and context before concluding with some personal thoughts about the future of St. George’s in this neighborhood.

Current Obstacles and Challenges to achieving our Vision

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

First, we are a small parish. 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 St. George's a spiritual life which is able to refocus and sustain them. These parishioners pray deeply for our neighbourhood, but are already overly committed to a life-style of service to others in their work place, with their friends and in volunteer work. The opportunities for service are countless and our numbers are so small.

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

Third, sometimes our worship is seen to be self-indulgent and an obstacle in itself to outreach. Seen this way, the rich liturgy, the archaic language of the Prayer Book, culturally foreign liturgical music and a cathedral-style worship which demands great concentration on the part of the worshipper while the choir offers the music and choral praise, combine to make our worship an aesthetic experience which carries no impulse to befriend our neighbours, and may be inaccessible to the neighbour who walks into our worship. So often I hear from parishioners who are outreach minded that our worship is a form of escapism, an irresponsible pursuit of a private and solitary spirituality of self-care and quietism. And we do seem ashamed of our liturgical choral music when we come together to share worship with our neighbourhood congregations, perhaps revealing that we think a Magnificat by the contemporary composer John Taverner or the traditional Palm Sunday antiphons, are for our "private" and "enclosed" worship, inappropriate to be shared with others, or even able to be appreciated by others.

Fourth, 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.

Fifth. 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 funded by sources external to the parish and his work is specific to youth. This means that when folk in need, or folk just wanting information, or folk wanting to help, come along, there are no "open hours" that they know they can speak to someone. We cannot afford an office employee. A number of 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. Thus, for the neighbourhood persons in need, or even for the neighbour who is curious, we are a closed church building and a vacant, unresponsive large parish hall.

Sixth. 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 is clear that we cannot maintain even our present level of ministry unless our congregation grows. A quick comparison with other churches in the neighbourhood.

St. Patrick's Roman Catholic church has a small congregation, but its relationship to the archdiocese is less autonomous than is our relationship to the 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 staffing of the newspaper Street Feat, written and sold by those who are homeless or unemployed; it maintains a full time fieldworker and provide her an office at Turning Point; and it has the financial resources to assist those who are needy in different ways.

Brunswick Street United Church is another church which is entirely different in how its community work is sponsored. It is the best example of an attempt to grow a "community church" in the neighbourhood. In a description of work in the 1960's it is interesting to learn that even then it was open to the community daily from 9 am to 9 pm. There was a large staff providing services to the community. A Christian education and community worker was responsible for seven camps each summer at their own facility, Camp Brunswick, with a total of 170 campers and 60 leaders. A full time staff deaconess was responsible, among other things, for 100 teenage youths who would gather each Friday evening from the neighbourhood. The clothing centre was up and running then, with four staff and many volunteers. Brunswick Street United continues to identify itself as a community church, but as in the 1960's, perhaps even more so today, most of the money and resources that pay for staff, support programmes etc. come from United Church mission funds 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 22% 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 hiring staff or expanding outreach programmes.

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.

The first, is the burden of place – we worship in a beautiful church building. 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 be the “Church of England” – powerful, rich, privileged, independent and stand-offish. Today, none of those things may be true, but they are still perceived to be true.

And it is not only issues of money, social status and prestige. During the restoration often the question of the “slave gallery” would be mentioned. The tradespeople involved in the restoration would often use the term. During the time of the restoration, it was only when I was asked about it at a Cornwallis Street Baptist church function that I realized that the supposed “slave gallery” was still a very powerful reality 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 the time I explained that we were not replacing the “slave gallery” because there had never been one. I thought nothing more about it until this 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 incredulous “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 chains which were still to be found up there before the fire. This time I was disturbed, for it seemed that the myth of the “slave gallery” 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 go on about this myth because it does tell 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 imperialist, racist and privileged past. These are hard words, and difficult to speak, but we can contribute to changing this perception only by acknowledging its existence. I shall address the overcoming of this perception in a few moments in the last section of this talk. For now, I want to point out that this myth fits in with the broader perception of our community profile as a privileged congregation. From the standpoint of our neighbours taking the initiative to befriend us and come to be with us, our apparent wealth, education and success make us 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.”

In all this, I make no judgement about the source or accuracy of any of these perceptions, but only wish to make the point that 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.

All of the above points to a tremendous opportunity for Saint George's to play a positive and significant role in the nourishing of an exciting, healthy, creative and culturally diverse neighbourhood.

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

Thus far this lecture is too much a challenge to parishioners and not at all an objective description of the parish and such that an outsider might gain a thorough and fair picture of its present character. From this evening's presentation someone unfamiliar with Saint George's today would not know of the many truly heartwarming positive indications that this parish has made significant steps towards solidarity and neighbourliness. The Shining Lights neighbourhood street choir recently sang here for the congregation, then recorded their CD here which will be released from the round church on 15 December; we were thrilled when we were asked if Black History Month 2001 might have its opening event here in February; the parish is preparing to host its fourth annual Stepping Stone Christmas Dinner for programme users, children and families; YouthNet has touched the lives of many neighbourhood children who have, in turn, touched our lives even more deeply, and so on.

But I shall not change horses now. For we, as congregation, must not be distracted from the real and urgent challenge which presents itself to us at this moment in our history. The exciting opportunity to live the Gospel must be grasped.

But how?

First, we must be alert and thoughtful about our relation to our neighbourhood, such that whatever direction it may take, its future development remain 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 Network, 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 similar neighbourhoods throughout the western world has much to teach us about how not to proceed. We still have time to do things properly and to build up this neighbourhood with a healthy balance of residential, commercial and institutional development. We have many things in our favor including the measured pace at which the 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.

Second, 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 the missionary who started to receive wounded persons down river, and would care for them. She became 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-face downstream ministry, but our parish is ill-suited 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.

As well, parishioners often know decision-makers in the broader region who sometimes make decisions which adversely affect disadvantaged groups here. Thus parishioners can be an effective advocate for this community by explaining the issues which face people here. I remember when HRDC made the harsh decision to close the Canada Employment Centre on Gottingen Street, and the ensuing difficult months of the sit-in by community members. We were involved in the ongoing care and encouragement of the demonstrators and participated in the demonstrations, but our real contribution was to be the funnel through which the federal government officials through Mary Clancy, MP, felt comfortable enough to speak informally with me about how the situation could most quickly be resolved in a manner fair to the people here.

Upstream ministry also means becoming articulate about the issues on the street and advocating for fair and just government policy. Last month there was a perfect opportunity missed when the government was holding hearings on the then proposed Employment Support and Income Assistance Act (Bill 62) the members of the panel hearing the presentations expected to hear first voice persons directly affected by the social assistance cuts and other implications of the bill, and they equally expected the usual sincere, mostly professional advocates for those who find themselves on social assistance or various types of disability assistance. Stephen Blackwood made such a presentation. But think if lawyers, engineers, fund-raisers, historians, administrators and college professors and other professionals of this parish had appeared as individuals before the panel, to reason that the bill was inadequate in several crucial ways and that

critical amendments should be made before the bill was passed. It will make a difference in the setting of public policy in this city and province if people of influence began 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.

Third, the way forward for this particular parish is to be ourselves and let our neighbours come to know us in all our uniqueness and peculiarities. We are an odd bunch and ought not to hide it. Our parish is committed to a very specific type of spiritual life which we might call "classical Anglicanism". 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 assumption 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 poverty are very capable of a holy imaginative life which is nourished by exposure to beauty, art, music, poetry and vision.

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 – director of the North End Health Clinic for its first twenty 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.

Fourth, although we are struggling financially to survive as a parish, because we are debt free (though just barely) and not reliant upon external church, corporate or government funding, we are free to remain non-competitive 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 on 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.

Fifth, we do worship in a beautiful building for which we are responsible for its care and maintenance. But this building does not belong to us – it belongs to the community. When the dome was being built out here on the parking lot we encouraged 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 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 within 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.

I had hoped for something more concrete from this talk, but I arrived at the end quite 'empty handed'. But 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. Thus 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 you 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 being 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 to those who serve the poor; it is given to 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.³

The future relation of Saint George's to its community in the first decades of the twenty-first century will be determined by our devotion to God and neighbour. In this devotion we shall know our own happiness.

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

² Negroes, Whites and Churches in Halifax, published by the United Church of Canada

³ Jean Vanier as quoted in the Anglican Journal, December, 2000