

The Church of St John the Evangelist, Ottawa
February 29, 2004

Rekindling the Vision: A Plan for Restoration and Renovation of St John's Church

*A presentation to the Annual Vestry Meeting
by Martha Nixon, People's Warden*

I would like to begin by thanking a small group of people who joined me last Sunday for a discussion about how best to proceed in planning for the next steps on our renovation of the Church. These people were Ross Hammond, Paige Dampier, Patricia Bowen, Monica Patten and John Gallienne. Their helpful thoughts are reflected in what follows.

At a special Vestry meeting on February 15th, the congregation voted to sell our Parking Lot. This decision was made in the best interest of the parish, and as a result, we will have one million dollars for renovations, a parking level in the condominium complex, and the opportunity to provide affordable housing. Although the vote was in accordance with the democratic process, and the result in favour of the motion, a third of those present voted against the motion, and this is a cause for concern.

For future decisions about church renovations, to be made by the parish community, we would like to establish a process that leads to greater consensus and unity. Such a process would ensure that everyone was informed to his or her own level of satisfaction (perhaps an impossible task), and would be even better prepared when voting. There is little doubt in the minds of the majority of parishioners that work has to be done in order to have our building fully functional for many years to come. However, there are bound to be emotional decisions surrounding renovations to the Nave, and as a result, we need to have a shared vision of what we would like to accomplish. Ideally, that vision should have input from every member of the congregation. We must recognize, even then, that even with a wonderful "process", we will still have to make decisions by a majority vote.

Now that the parish has voted to sell the Parking Lot, we must re-energize our desire to renovate and restore the church. To this end the Corporation, and the ARC Steering Committee will ask ARC to prepare a clear plan, and to outline the restoration and renovations needed, and over time bring recommendations to the congregation regarding the order of their priority, and how to accomplish them.

First, we must acknowledge again the excellent work done by ARC over the past year. It has been a challenging year, dealing with both the renovations and the parking lot. Now that a decision has been made to sell the parking lot, ARC can focus most of its energies on the renovations, and those issues that may deal with interface with the condominium. As well, we

hope to involve more parishioners in the ARC process, likely through participation in sub-committees. ARC will continue to be led by Gay Richardson, who has proven to be an indefatigable and highly capable leader and motivator.

The Affordable Housing Committee will take responsibility for the affordable housing component of the condominium. Monica Patten has stepped forward to offer new leadership for this committee. We are very appreciative of the leadership provided by Gay over this past critical period. Gay will continue to be a dedicated and active member of the committee.

Over the past two weeks, discussions have taken place in the ARC Steering Committee, and the Corporation, concerning the question of “where to begin” in our renovation plan. There are possibly two jumping-off points: first, to return to the excellent work done by Cecilia Humphreys in analyzing our Ministries’ needs. Second, we need to obtain further drawings of the Nave configuration as described by the Nave Sub-Committee. Renovations to the Nave will undoubtedly be the most contentious issue to be resolved by the parish. Yet decisions related to the Nave will have an impact on all other areas of the building, and may even have an impact on whether or not we need extra space in the new condominium

As a result of ARC and other groups at St John’s trying to find a plan and a process to ensure we work together as a community in determining our priorities for renovation, an interesting idea has emerged, one that has the potential to feed into our planning for the future, and help us frame our vision. Most of us have stories about why St John’s is such a special place for us. Relating our stories will allow us to listen to each other, to understand why our Church is cherished, and to better understand why change is difficult for many. This proposal is in the early stages of discussion and will be shared with Parish Council early in March.

In summary, from the plans prepared by ARC, the wider views as expressed through sub-committees, the sharing with one another of our love for this church and community, and the continued help of prayer, we hope that a vision will become clear, guiding us to decision making in the best interests of all parishioners. We look forward to hearing your views on this process.