

Friday, November 20, 2020

To all members and friends of the congregation of St. George's Place du Canada,

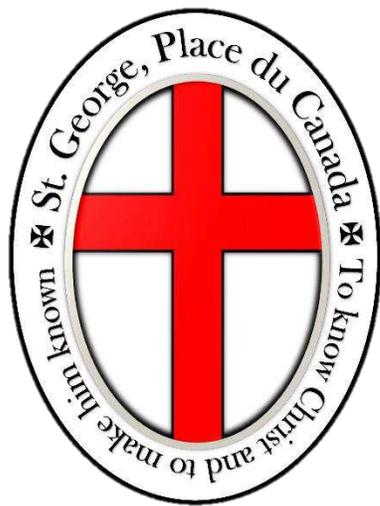
It has been several weeks now since our parish met together online, to receive the news that after many months of preparation and expectation, the initial presentation of our development project, led by Quo Vadis, received a rejection from the advisory committee at the city, (*Comité mixte*) which reviews projects from an architectural and heritage perspective. This came to all of us, both at St. George's and at Quo Vadis as a real blow. From a personal point of view, it has given me much pause for thought, and I have sat down to write to you all with this news several times, and yet was left unable to really formulate my thoughts until now, several weeks later.

It seems to me that there are now a number of ways to proceed, and a number of choices that we will necessarily need to make. Natalie from Quo Vadis has continued her work on our behalf and has taken to advocating for this project politically. She feels that this is the project's best hope and she feels that she does have support from the politicians on this project. I think that St. George's has nothing to lose in keeping her and this project in our prayers, as ultimately, I believe that the project going forward is still St. George's preferred direction.

However, I think it would be foolish to continue on as if we are in any way assured of this project's acceptance by the city. In fact, we have been given little in the way of assurances, and I believe that even Natalie was genuine when she told me that she really does not know yet about its chances of success. This leads me to believe that as a church, we need to begin to plan and pray about our plan B. Realistically, I believe that if the Quo Vadis project is finally rejected by the politicians, it will be a considerable period of time before another developer approaches us to offer us any deal. We have to take very seriously that two developers over the past four years or so, have been unable to secure zoning changes necessary for development on this piece of land. Furthermore, the *Comité mixte* apparently said point blank that they could see no possibility of a building being permitted on that piece of land, that it was simply too important a heritage site.

It would seem to me that the time is upon us to begin to imagine other strategies. I am proposing that we do that by seriously undertaking a process of visioning and strategic planning. We have a few weeks to start to imagine how we might accomplish that, but my initial thoughts are that we might form several quite small working groups, groups which would meet together to gather initial information that could subsequently be shared amongst others in the overall planning process. Initially I think the groups could be organized around the following topics:

1. Investments
2. Budget including revenue and expenses
3. Stewardship
4. Mission
5. Worship
6. Building (maintenance and repair)



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Each group would be initially tasked with a fairly serious review of where we are. Secondly, we would be asking them, through consultation with the wider community, and other groups, to project where we, as a group, can realistically expect to be in 2-4 years' time. And in the end, all of us may need to do a reality check, as we realize that our hopes and dreams for St. George's are constrained by the financial resources we have left. In other words, I expect that the reality of our finances may well temper our ambitions considerably. The truth is, we can no longer run deficits, and our remaining capital does not support the budgets we have been putting forward in recent years. My hope is to begin this planning in earnest in the early new year, realizing that for the most part it will be accomplished over Zoom.

Obviously, this is hard news, but I am confident that in the end, we will prove up to the task. In fact, St. George's has a legacy of being generously endowed, and we have much to be thankful for in the foresight of our predecessors. The initial group of visionaries who formed a trust, committed to being proprietors, not because they believed that they wanted a secure or inclusive community, but rather, they were called by God to take on the responsibility of raising funds for the building of a grand church, dedicated to the Glory of God. Their call included spreading a message of hope for all the people in the growing city around them. And now today, when we too have received such just a call from God, there is no reason that we should not imagine to be following in their footsteps and able renew our congregation's fortunes and future. But we cannot expect to be able to do so without a new and realistic plan. Over the next month or so, we will be putting these small groups together, and I invite your name if you might be interested in participating.

On a happier note, in the next few days you will receive a complete list of services at St. George's for the Advent and Christmas season. As a preview to such a complete list, please note that as an experiment, we will be having three in-person communion services limited to 25 participants to be held on the following dates

Advent 1 November 29 at 10:30am

Advent 3 December 13 at 10:30am.

Christmas Eve Dec. 24 at 5:00pm.

These services will be small, to ensure distancing, and sadly, without the singing that we are familiar with over the holiday season, though Philip will be there to play the organ. In every case you will have to connect with Carol at the office for reservations, either by phone or email. If you have not made a reservation for the given day, we cannot promise you admittance. Of course, we will retain our zoom services at 10:30am for each Sunday in Advent, and at 8:00pm Christmas Eve.

There remain several other projects that you should be aware of as we go into Advent. A set of daily reflections have been collected together by Lizzy and Rev. Noonan, which should hit your email box soon. Also, there is a Wednesday evening study group that will look at some passages of Handel's Messiah, whose dates will come out shortly. CivitasX has a number of ongoing projects that you will have heard about. All of this is done with the love of God firmly planted in the foreground of our imagination. We thank God every day for the ministries to which he has called us.

Sincerely and In Christ

Karen+

*And his name shall be called Wonderful!, Counsellor!, The mighty God,
The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. (Isaiah 9:6)..*