

Mission, Ministry, and Money

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How does a small parish of one hundred households, located on the wrong side of the tracks, engage in significant outreach to those within its parish boundaries and beyond? Perhaps the story of St. John's Anglican Cathedral Parish can give some pointers and encouragement to similarly situated parishes.

St. John's is in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, just a few kilometers west of the center of the North American continent. It is the oldest Anglican parish west of the Great Lakes on either side of the Canada-U.S. border, having been founded when the Reverend John West arrived in the Red River Settlement on October 14, 1820. The Anglican clergyman had come to the prairie wilderness to serve as chaplain to the officers and men of the Hudson's Bay Company, as missionary to the Saulteaux, Cree, and Oji-Cree people who inhabited the region, and as pastor to the Selkirk Settlers. The Selkirk Settlers had been victims of the Highland Clearances in Scotland and, under the aegis of Lord Selkirk, a director of the Hudson's Bay Company, had found a haven on the western bank of the Red River. The fact that the Selkirk Settlers were, by and large, Presbyterian left the Reverend John West unperturbed, and he set to and ministered to them for three years before returning to England. He was succeeded by the Reverend David Jones, who labored in the vast territory of Rupert's Land for the next fifteen years, holding regular worship services, attending to the needs of his largely non-Anglican flock, establishing a school for the children of the settlers, the Hudson's Bay men, and the indigenous peoples.

St. John's exerted great influence in the community over the years, influence that continued when the territory of Rupert's Land was carved into the provinces of Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba (in 1870 Manitoba was the first province to join the original Canadian Federation, founded in 1867), and the rough-and-ready fur

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trading fort and farming settlement was transformed into the city of Winnipeg, a hub of commerce and trade. Goods were transported in and out of Winnipeg by rail to and from the east and the west, and by steamboat from the south. This happy situation continued until the opening of the Panama Canal, which made it cheaper to transport goods from east to west.

Despite the decline of Winnipeg's importance as a center of trade, St. John's continued to be a power in the city and the province. Archbishop Machray, who came from Scotland as Bishop of Rupert's Land in 1865 and remained until his death in 1904, established St. John's College, the founding college of what is now the University of Manitoba, to train clergy to serve the spiritual needs of immigrants who were beginning to arrive in the west in great numbers, lured by Sir Clifford Sifton's promises of cheap land. Machray was also instrumental in establishing what is now the independent Anglican Church of Canada (although in his day it was still the Church of England in Canada), and served as the first Primate of Canada.

Through the years, four different buildings housed the community of St. John's. The first, a Red River frame building, was destroyed by the great flood of 1826, and the second, built of stone in 1832, was severely affected by the great flood of 1850 and was eventually pulled down to make way for the first actual cathedral (the first bishop had arrived in 1849), which was built in 1862. By the early years of the twentieth century, the walls of the third church were being propped up with poles, and while the new century was still in its teens, the 1862 cathedral was deemed unfit for use. The present cathedral, a massive Norman-Gothic style structure, opened its doors in 1926.

With the crash of 1929, the cathedral parish entered decline. It managed to "live" off its endowments for several years, but population shifts in the years following the Second World War left the cathedral high and dry in Winnipeg's North End, a neighborhood now home to mostly Jewish, Ukrainian, Polish, and other eastern European immigrants and their descendants. The glory days were over.

Throughout the 1950s, 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, the cathedral parish suffered not only financial but congregational declines. Fund-raising became a necessary evil in order to keep the doors open, along with using bequests and selling off houses and land that the cathedral owned in order to pay the bills. What remained of the pool of Anglicans living in the North End was dispersed through three other parishes within a stone's throw of the cathedral. The only real investment

in the world outside the walls of the church was minimal. One of the houses remaining in the cathedral's hands was set up as a staging home for refugees. That ministry has grown considerably over the past fifteen years, to the point where Hospitality House is now the second-largest refugee ministry in Canada.

In 1998, St. John's Cathedral engaged in a process of visioning and planning, with a focus on determining God's will for the cathedral community and the surrounding neighborhood. One of the results of the process was a determination to move out of maintenance mode into active ministry. A moratorium on all fundraising activities to pay the bills was declared (*that* decision ruffled more than a few feathers!). Fundraising was replaced by a serious program of stewardship education. Within just three years, the cathedral had doubled its congregational offerings and was able to move on to achieve other goals that had arisen from the visioning and planning process. When the parish received a generous undesignated bequest, the congregation supported the establishment of an Outreach Trust that allows the cathedral, which is low on physical human resources (of the one hundred households that make up the parish rolls, the majority of the people are aged between 50 and 80), to make financial investments in the neighborhood around its doors.

The interest from the Outreach Trust allows the cathedral to provide grants to community groups engaged in initiatives that "enhance and/or improve the lives of people living within the boundaries of St. John's Parish." Since 2004, St. John's has provided grants to such diverse groups as schools (money which has been used to provide scholarships for graduating students, to buy books for school libraries, and for the Bookbag program whereby children can take home books to read with their parents), and community kitchen programs set up for newcomers to Winnipeg (mostly women who have moved into the city from reserves or who have come to Canada as refugees) in which they can make friends as they shop for ingredients and cook together, creating nutritious meals for their families under the guidance of a trained nutritionist.

Other groups that have benefited by the St. John's outreach grant program are food banks and soup kitchens; a local public library which requested funds to buy books that focus on First Nations peoples, their contributions, history, and experience (the largest urban indigenous community in Canada lies within St. John's parish boundaries); and the North End Community Renewal Council, which is dedicated

to upgrading housing stock in the neighborhood, running literacy and job-preparation programs for local residents, and generally improving life for people who live in the North End. A call from the local member of our federal Parliament last summer resulted in St. John's providing the wherewithal to bus disadvantaged North End kids to and from swimming pools in other areas when the public pool in the North End was closed. The outreach fund has also provided financial support for the nearby Vineyard Church, which ministers to street people and the homeless in the area.

In addition to providing financial support to various groups, St. John's Cathedral also uses its physical plant to serve the local community. During the global economic collapse of 2008, Canadians were not as severely affected as people in other parts of the world, but there were job losses, particularly in Manitoba's manufacturing sector. The cathedral's response was to give administrative support for the unemployed by providing assistance with resume preparation, access to a computer so that people could job-search online, office space, and telephone and fax use. The cathedral also provides a meeting place for a seniors' exercise group, the local historical society, and a community kitchen, and hosts educational events that are open to people from all over the diocese, within and beyond the Anglican Church. One such program is the annual Trinity Conference. St. John's was the first Canadian site to host the Trinity live webcast, starting in 2003. Another is the annual "Living the Questions" series of Lenten study, an ecumenical program that invites members of other faith traditions to take part.

Annually, the cathedral community sets up the Charlie Brown Christmas Tree in the narthex during Advent and congregation members contribute new scarves, mittens, hats, and gloves for children. Many of the contributions are handmade. The fruit of the tree is dispersed to area schools in the week before Christmas. The majority of students attending schools in the cathedral's neighborhood live below the poverty line, and the Charlie Brown Christmas Tree yield fills a real need. Other congregation-based programs include the annual gathering of layettes and baby needs for a diocesan-wide program, and the ongoing collection of nonperishable foods for the local central food bank. Every week a group of women from the congregation meet at the cathedral to have lunch and then spend the afternoon knitting prayer shawls, praying over every stitch. The shawls are given to comfort those who are ill, bereaved, or in need of solace.

While community-building activities like holding an annual rummage sale continued, the proceeds from the sale no longer went into cathedral funds but into the Outreach Trust. The same goes for the offering received during the cathedral's popular Red River Celebration, which puts a different twist on the traditional Festival of Advent Lessons and Carols by recounting the history of the cathedral and the witness and faith of past congregations.

In 2008, Pollock's, a landmark independent hardware store in the North End, announced it was closing its doors after almost a century in business. Pollock's is one of the few places in Winnipeg, maybe even in Manitoba, where one can find replacement faucets for old-fashioned bathtubs and other items needed to replace worn-out fittings in houses that were built one hundred years ago. (Not everyone wants a bathroom or kitchen that looks like it came out of *House and Garden*. Antiquity has charm.) Winnipeg has a long history in the cooperative movement, and local residents, including the cathedral community, immediately formed a cooperative, bought the store, and sold shares. The shareholders serve as a volunteer sales force. The cathedral holds a membership and several shares, and business is booming!

St. John's Cathedral is also involved in the Jubilee Fund, an inter-faith fund launched in 2000 as a Winnipeg-based expression of the worldwide millennium celebrations for debt relief and the scriptural call for the periodic redistribution of wealth and cancellation of debt. This initiative provides seed money for people setting up small businesses through a program of loan guarantees. The individual entrepreneurs and organizations that tap into the Jubilee Fund are not eligible for loans from traditional lending agencies like banks and credit unions. The Jubilee Fund is supported through Jubilee Investment. Certificates are purchased by members as three-to-five-year term deposits. Membership can be held by individual people, by businesses, or by community organizations. The funds provided by investors are pooled and used as collateral to guarantee loans for community initiatives. The interest received by investors is lower than the current market rate and the members can, and often do, choose to donate their interest payments to the fund.

Over and above reaching out into the community around its doors, the cathedral also embarked on a "greening" process, upgrading its plumbing, heating, and lighting facilities, and insulating the roof and some of the walls to conserve energy.

One of the unexpected side-benefits of all this activity has been the development of a stronger, more committed, more cohesive congregation because the cathedral community has taken ownership of all the initiatives set in place over the past twelve years. Visitors who join the congregation for Sunday worship never fail to comment on the hospitality and the love-filled atmosphere that pervades the cathedral.

Any parish that embarks on any of the programs outlined in this article would be wise to begin with a visioning and planning process, which ensures that any and all programs and initiatives that arise from the process are supported and owned by the whole congregation. With its present outreach, stewardship, education, liturgical renewal, and environmental programs, the Cathedral Parish of St. John is making progress in its conscious and deliberate efforts to discern God's will for the mission and ministry of the Anglican Church in this part of the world.