



CHRIST CHURCH, DARTMOUTH

A People United in Justice and Love

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February 1, 2022

Draw your Church together, O God, into one great company of disciples, together following our Lord Jesus Christ into every walk of life, together serving him in his mission to the world, and together witnessing to his love on every continent and island. Amen

“Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.”— Martin Luther King Jr.

Dear Friends in Christ,

Last week, Rev. Bonnie and I chatted over coffee with someone who called Christ Church their home this past summer. As they lived in a tent on our property, the support they felt from Christ Church was very much appreciated. Throughout their stay, Christ Church enabled them to secure housing and, in many ways, improved their life. Whenever they are in town, this person drops into the office to reconnect and to thank our ministry team for the kindness, support, and dignity Christ Church has shown them. Their experience is one of the many examples of ministry in our community.

We have periodically been separated physically throughout the pandemic, unable to attend in-person worship at times or connect through the various groups and committees we may serve on. Despite this environment and the challenges it imposes, the Church continues its work of being a place of welcome and refuge. This being said, this last while, I have overheard personally or indirectly comments in the parish from people relating to the vital work we are doing as a church: *“We aren’t doing anything to help. And we don’t know what is going on.”* I have listened to such statements more than once and find this challenging and discouraging to hear. On behalf of many parishioners, I find it difficult to hear, not only for those trying to make a difference, but I also suspect that some may not know of the thanks we receive from clients who access our services. I wish to share with you again some of the things we are doing as a parish to serve others.

In terms of the support for the community, Parish Council tasked parish executive (Myself and Parish Wardens) with researching and offering help to community members who identify as needing support.¹ To address the community’s needs, we have engaged in partnerships and conversations to provide housing and food support to downtown Dartmouth. As we embarked on this mission, the advice we received from other organizations who have gone down this path is

¹ PC Minutes CC, September 23, 2021

that we may think we have the answer or that change occurs immediately. However, we have learned that it is imperative to actively listen to the needs of the most vulnerable and understand a situation not sweepingly but often on a contextual and 1-1 basis. Through our experience, conversations, and advocacy, we actively seek to change the system, so shelter is considered not a necessity but a universal right. As we strive to live out our ministry, we have engaged many organizations regarding possible ways in which we can help, specifically a drop-in warming shelter and emergency shelter:

Affordable Housing Association of Nova Scotia: In September of last year, Jim Graham, Executive Director and Monika Hintz Reaching Home Program Officer, shared with Parish Council the needs of the vulnerable and homeless population of Dartmouth. Following this presentation, the council decided to pursue the idea of a warming centre. At the time, because of complications due to COVID and resource barriers, we could not find a strong commitment from a volunteer organization. It is simply not a matter of opening our doors, but often clients need support in areas such as mental health, addictions, abuse, and navigating the justice system. Parish Council believed we needed appropriate help to fully serve others before being of greater service to the community.

Welcome Housing and Support Services (WHSS) was also in conversation with AHANS regarding a drop-in/warming centre. We have an established relationship with WHSS and Leigh MacLean (Housing Support), so it was satisfying to see that they were also looking to address our community's needs. WHSS was awarded support from AHANS to expand its current operations, and AHANS believed that the best way to serve our area was through WHSS, and we supported their decision. This being said, there is the collective belief that a drop-in/warming centre at Christ Church is needed. We continue to connect with WHSS to see how we can support each other, and we have offered our space and resources to their organization as they require. Our partnership continues as we mutually support and serve clients searching for housing.

Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) made a community-wide call for help this past fall as the city sought temporary space for modular homes. John Gallant and I met with Erica Fleck (Assistant Chief Emergency Management/Community Risk Reduction HRM Fire & Emergency). We toured our property to see if we met the requirements for modular homes. We did not because our property is not large enough. At that meeting, we received interest from the city to support a warming centre, and emergency shelter. Dealing with multiple agencies can be time-consuming and challenging. A memorandum of agreement regarding the emergency shelter has been exchanged between the parish and HRM. On 7 February, John Gallant and I will meet with city officials to confirm the details of a warming centre and emergency shelter.

Margaret's House During these colder months, foodbank volunteers and the parish executive recognized that clients of Margaret's House have been standing in the cold as they wait for their daily meals. Before the new year, John Gallant connected with Karen Goudie, House Coordinator of Margaret's House and offered the lower hall as a place of warmth. However, as the Omicron wave began, Karen wished to postpone because of its policies around COVID and their clients' safety. As things improve, we will let you know how this relationship has grown, as we hope to

open the hall as soon as possible. If you would like to support this by any means, please get in touch with the parish office.

Throughout these past few months, I have networked with many officials regarding the issue of homelessness and poverty: Sam Austin, our city councillor, Tim Russeco CEO of Downtown Dartmouth Business Commission, Leigh MacLean of Welcome Housing and Support Services, and Monica Hintz of AHANS. Next week, I will be meeting with Claudia Chender MLA for Dartmouth-South, to explore the idea of our warming centre and how Christ Church can help the greater community. I have also met with Jennifer Deane, the Outreach Coordinator at Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish, Dartmouth, to learn how our Roman Catholic brothers and sisters are helping others and how we could work together in specific areas.

Not only are we working on this housing problem by networking and trying to establish a place for refuge, but John Gallant, Christine Hoehne, Rev. Bonnie, and I have been working with clients on a 1-1 basis to find support and housing. In many cases, Christ Church is the advocate for these individuals; we are the organization filling out paperwork, faxing in forms, providing our address and phone number so clients can connect with government agencies to put housing in place. We are constantly calling to see if a client is still on the list for new housing—all while supporting about 70 food bank clients per week. Our foodbank ministry also provides specific clothing for the winter months. Since the beginning of the pandemic, Christ Church has partnered with Public Health as we offer rapid testing Thursday mornings to anyone in the community who wishes to access this service. Take-home tests are also available for clients. Rev. Bonnie and I regularly test on Thursday mornings to encourage others. John Gallant has also reached out to specific health agencies to offer space if a vaccination clinic is needed.

All of the work that parish executive and others have been doing has been to support the lives of our neighbours and to live out our parish Vision Statement: “We are called to be a radically inclusive, just, and loving community that seeks to love our neighbour through prayer, worship, action, and advocacy.” As a parish, I want to assure you that we are trying our best, and often change does not happen overnight. With COVID significantly affecting all parts of life, including our worship and our ability to connect personally on campus, the picture of what we are doing may not be evident for some. As such, if you have any suggestions or comments, please reach out to me, one of our parish wardens or a member of the parish council. If you have any advice or ideas, please connect. We have gifts to contribute, and we want to ensure that yours are being used!

Now is a sensitive time for communities, so we need to be kind to each other and supportive through active listening. Throughout the process, the parish executive has updated the parish council on the work it has been doing. Our parish council and parish executive have sought to be clear on what is happening through announcements, letters from the rector, PC highlights and minutes of our meetings.

As we seek to support our neighbours in the broader community, we need to consider our Christ Church community. Rev. Bonnie and I, along with the parish pastoral visitors, have continued a phone ministry, connecting with people who identified as wanting contact throughout the pandemic.

During Lent, a parish-wide call will once again be made to all parishioners. Please do not hesitate to connect with Rev. Bonnie or me if you require pastoral care. We care about you, and we want to hear from you if you are in need. We also understand that asking for help is not easy. COVID has displaced so many of us these last two years, so we want to support each other in our time of grief, sorrow or need.

I close with the following words, which I might highlight what some of us may be feeling and how we might address our weariness:

Taken from *Small Boat, Great Big Sea Communion Liturgy Celtic Daily Prayer Book*:

When you no longer know how to be,
may the Father take you on your deeper journey.
When you no longer know what to do,
may the Spirit reveal to you your fitting task.
When all feels lost or foreign
may you know your home in Christ.
On the path that is before you,
may you have companions for the journey,
may you find Christ in the stranger
and may you know the love and blessing of God.

Faithfully yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kyle Wagner". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

The Rev. Dr. Kyle Wagner
Rector, Christ Church, Dartmouth
Diocese of Nova Scotia, PEI
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