

**Reflections on the Life of
St. Philip Anglican Church
May 8, 2011
by Christopher Page**



What are you when you are 56 years old?

You are certainly not young; you are not quite old. But, to say you are still middle-aged, stretches the predictable mathematics of aging a little.

56 is hard to define. It does not fit neatly into any tidy category. A great deal of life is behind the 56-year-old. The majority of your career is probably past. If you have children, the likelihood is that they are launched into lives of their own. Your energy has probably diminished; you need more sleep than you once did.

St. Philip is a 56-year-old church. I share something in common with this church in which I have worked for so long. We were both born in 1954.

The difference between a 56-year-old man and a 56-year-old Anglican Church is that the church is still a very young church. I have been alive during the tenure of every Rector this church has ever had. There have only been six Rectors serving in St. Philip in its whole life. There are a few people who still worship at St. Philip who have personally known every Rector who has ever served in this church.

The past 56 years in the life of any Anglican church in Canada, particularly on the west coast of Canada, have been challenging years. They have been, overall, years of statistical decline. Attendance has dropped; finances have become tight; volunteer resources, time and energy have been increasingly limited.

St. Philip began life in 1954 as a traditional, middle of the road Anglican parish church. Then in the late '60's, the wind of the Spirit blew. Charismatic renewal came to St. Philip. There was an explosion of energy, vitality, and creativity. They were exciting times.

But the Spirit blows where it will and in the 1980's, the charismatic renewal in all mainline churches had begun to subside.

At the same time cultural shifts in society at large began to have an impact on traditional church communities. We had to adjust and explore the parameters of our ability to include people with different ideas and practices in our community. The Spirit challenged us to examine how open, welcoming, and inclusive we felt able to be.

For many people, the answers we at St. Philip came to in response to the challenge of inclusion were too broad. They felt compelled to leave this community to find communities in which the parameters are more closely and clearly drawn.

Many of us experienced deep pain as we realized people we had cared about and loved no longer felt they could worship Jesus

among us. People we had laughed and cried with were suddenly gone. It was hard to understand and difficult to accept, but we had no choice but to honour the decisions of those who chose to leave.

It is important that we acknowledge the pain of loss. We are diminished by the absence of those who have left us. It is tragic that a vision of openness and welcome causes some to feel excluded.

But we must not be bound by the past. We are called to move on with confidence in God's presence.

We pray God's blessing upon those who have departed from our community. We pray that they may always know there remains an absolute welcome in this community for them to join us in worshipping Jesus at any time.

Thankfully, some people have been able to adapt and change with us in this community.

I have profound admiration for those who have stayed through the turmoil of the past decade. Their faithfulness and steadiness speaks to me deeply of the true nature of the God revealed to us in Jesus Christ. They bear witness to a God who does not give up on us, who never walks away.

It is not that we who have remained or who have joined this community in the past ten years necessarily always agree about every detail of the way Jesus' Gospel of love should be embodied. We stay together because we experience the love of Jesus in this community. We know that our ability to experience the love of Jesus grows as we persevere together even in the midst of occasional disagreements.

Departures bring change. Our community has shifted. The "charismatic" cloth no longer fits. We have begun to discover a new sense of identity emerging.

But through all the changes of the past 56 years, in remarkable ways St. Philip has remained a vibrant, diverse, welcoming place.

We are a church that began in response to significant population growth in the neighbourhood in which our church building presently stands. Families wanted their children to go to Sunday School; so the Carnarvon Church Hall was built on the corner of Neil and Eastdowne. When parents realized they wanted to attend church with their children, St. Philip parish was born. Children led the way; the adults followed.

What does our history tell us about our present identity?

1. Christian

The first thing may seem obvious; but it is important to say. Through all the changes and uncertainties of the past 56 years, we have always been and we remain, a passionately committed Christian church.

We gather around the living presence of God known to us in Jesus Christ. We are a community that is formed by the teachings and the Spirit of Jesus. We desire to live in the Spirit of Jesus and to encourage one another to follow faithfully wherever that Spirit may lead.

We may not all express our faith in Jesus in exactly the same way. We have discovered in recent years that it is possible to love Jesus and to be faithful to Jesus without our lives necessarily needing to all look exactly the same. We understand that the Spirit of Jesus is present in peoples' lives in a variety of ways. We rejoice in that diversity. We affirm that wherever there is love, gentleness, goodness, and light, Jesus is present. We want to affirm the presence of Jesus in all of life and to celebrate the reality of God at the heart of all creation.

We hold a vibrant deeply committed faith in Jesus. But we also respect people who find different ways to express their faith. We want to trust that the Spirit of Christ is at work in diverse ways

throughout the world.

God is not confined to the tidy little boxes we have manufactured in our attempts to contain the transcendent reality that is the Mystery at the heart of the universe. We live in the deep mystery of God's abundance that permeates all of life. We rejoice in the reality of God's presence that transcends all human boundaries, rules, and formulations. We affirm that God is much bigger than our church.

2. Worship

Worship is and has always been the central activity of St. Philip Church.

We are not first and foremost an over-sized fellowship group. We do not exist primarily to be a social agency, an instrument of social action, or a moral educational institution. Our primary function is not to provide creative programming for everyone from birth to death.

These may all be good things for a church to do. But none of them is our unique and primary function.

The church exists to draw people together in worship of God. We gather Sunday by Sunday in order to direct our attention to the reality and presence of God's Spirit at work in our lives, in our midst, and in the world. Each time we gather for worship, we reenact that fundamental mystery that occurred the moment Jesus died when "the curtain in the temple was torn in two from top to bottom." We gather in order to pull back the veil that so often obscures our vision, hindering us from appreciating the beauty of the divine presence at the core of all reality.

We desire our worship to be deeply reverent, but at the same time, relaxed open and human. We gather in the mysterious presence of Christ who we experience as the reality of love at work in the world and in our lives.

One of the things that has happened in many Anglican Churches recently is that the "family service" has taken over as the main service in the church. In some cases this has meant that a later more traditional service has been cancelled.

At St. Philip we have an 8:00 traditional service in the morning, followed by a 9:00 family service, and then a more traditional service at 11:15. I remain committed to this pattern. It allows us to offer a diversity in worship and to honour the traditions that have nurtured this community for 56 years, while at the same time embrace the vitality and energy of young families.

3. Children

St. Philip has always been and remains a church about children. We came into existence as a community because of children. We continue to be deeply committed to the children in our church, to their spiritual growth and their deep welcome in this place. We want to be an environment in which children feel absolutely comfortable and in which they experience a deep sense of belonging and welcome.

On a number of occasions in the Gospels Jesus pointed to children as the image of what it means to be his follower. Children are open, non-judgmental, gentle, and generous. They remind us of all those qualities that reflect most deeply the image of God in whom we are created. They bring great energy to this community and are a source of joy in so many ways.

Jesus held up children as a primary model of what it means to be his follower. A community that has children at its heart will be flexible, open, gentle, respectful, and willing to listen deeply to every person in the community.

4. Mission

St. Philip has always been a church that looked outside the walls of this building to the needs of the world around us. For a long time much of this outward looking focus has been primarily oriented towards ministry in distant places. I believe it is

important for us to be aware of and responsive to the great needs of the world beyond our relatively comfortable community.

However, I also believe that the days of great overseas missions have ended. In a world that is struggling to move beyond the painful legacy of colonialism, people do not need, or want, foreigners coming into their countries telling them what to do, how to live, or what to believe. Supporting ministries run by indigenous people living in the countries they are serving remains a vital part of our life together.

But, alongside our awareness of the needs of the world beyond our immediate community, we need a vision of ministry as that which people who worship on Sunday do from Monday through Saturday in their regular lives outside the church.

We gather for worship in order that those who share in worship may feel strengthened and inspired to go back into their daily lives in the rest of the world and be a living authentic witness to the life and presence of Christ at work in the world.

The church's ministry takes place in families practicing love and mutual support. It happens in neighbourhoods where Christians interact respectfully with their neighbours with gentleness and kindness. Christian ministry occurs in workplaces where Christians conduct themselves with high ethical and moral standards working for the good of the world rather than for personal gain.

You are the ministry of this church wherever God has placed you to be an instrument of peace and love.

5. Stability

As I look to the future of this community of St. Philip, I am profoundly aware that I have been the Rector here for 18 years. I am the second longest serving Rector in the history of this church. I am enormously grateful for the privilege it has been to share in this community for so long. This community has been an

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inspiration to me and to my family. We have experienced love and grace in this place in abundance. We have been challenged to live deeply in dependence upon Christ. We have learned so many things as we have struggled and celebrated together in this community.

It is an enormous credit to the strength and commitment of the people of St. Philip that, I as the Rector, have been able to change and grow while remaining in this position. When I first came to St. Philip, I came as the Associate Rector serving under the Senior Rector. At that time, Heather and I had two small daughters.

Now we have two small granddaughters who, along with our two daughters and our son-in-law, worship regularly as part of this community. Even my sister, her husband, and my niece and nephew are regular attenders at the 8:00 service. It is not possible to express what a privilege and a blessing it is to share in worship with your entire family.

Frequently these days I am asked whether I feel called to move to a different church. The question is based upon the fact that I have been here in this community for 24 years, although only 18 of those years as Rector.

I have never felt the slightest desire to exercise ministry as part of a different community. There has never been a moment when ministry in this place felt dull or constricting. In many ways it is a dramatically different church than the one to which I first came in 1987, or the one in which I was appointed Rector in 1993, or even the community that began to emerge in the past 10 years.

I am not a tremendously demonstrative person. I leave most of the hugging business up to Harry. But I love this community. I was deeply struck when I walked in here last Sunday in the middle of the 9:00 service by the tenderness and warmth in this community. There is a deep spirit of love in this place that is the

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true message of the Gospel. I am so thankful to continue in ministry with you all.

We are a young community, even if not all of us are in fact still young. I believe there is a new spirit being born in our midst. It is a spirit of deep respect for all people, openness, gentleness, love, and patient listening.

We live in a complex world. We can no longer afford the luxury of dividing the human community into people who are like us and therefore we judge as good and those who are different than us and who we therefore feel justified in excluding.

We must understand that God's work in this world is bigger than the work of the church. God's work in this world is bigger even than the Christian faith. We cannot confine the movement of God's Spirit to the constructs we have formed to express our faith. God is present in all faiths, even in people who profess no faith, working to draw all people to an awareness of the power of love at work in all life.

Jesus said, "In my Father's house there are many dwelling-places." (*John 14:2*) He said, "I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice." (*John 10:16*) He said, "Whoever is not against us is for us." (*Mark 9:40*)

John the letter writer said, "God is love" (*1 John 4:8*) and "everyone who loves is born of God and knows God" (*1 John 4:7*).

Wherever love is present, God cannot be absent.

Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life." (*John 14:6*) So, wherever there is a way into truth and life, Jesus is present.

We need to throw open the doors. We need to become people who discern the presence of Jesus in the schools our children attend, in our place of work, in the faith of fellow spiritual

travellers. We need to find Jesus in our city, in our media, and in our neighbourhoods.

When we find Jesus present in strange unexpected places, we need to rejoice and be glad that God is bigger than the little boxes we have made in our attempts to define God in our image. We must not forget that our real call is to find God's image in every person we met.

Jesus said that, in the end, there will be those who come into God's full presence asking,

“Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?” (*Matthew 25:37-39*)

Jesus calls these people, "the righteous," even though they lived their lives without recognizing Jesus.

There are those who have lived the Jesus life without ever naming it as the life of Jesus.

When God raised Jesus from the dead, life exploded beyond all confines. Jesus broke down all the barriers and boundaries that separate people from one another. His desire was that we might know ourselves to be "one flock." When Jesus broke the chains of death and rose from the dead, we were supposed to understand that God's Spirit cannot be contained. God's Spirit is like a child, spilling out over the edges, blurring the boundaries, happily going places we might think are inappropriate.

Speaking of his Spirit in John's Gospel, Jesus said,

“The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.” (*John 3:8*)

I pray that as we move forward as a community of Christians we may be able to throw open the doors and celebrate the reality of Love at work throughout the world. I want us to be a big church, not necessarily big in numbers and programs, but big in heart. I want us to embody a large and spacious spirit that is willing to take chances on people and to trust that God's Spirit is at work in rich and diverse ways.

An expansive, open, spacious, inclusive vision is the only vision that has the capacity to move us forward in a life-giving way in this fractious twenty-first century.

Let us move together to declare that God's love known to us in Jesus is greater than all the forces of violence, separation, and exclusion that divide our world. Let us be the community of intimate loving fellowship that will reveal the presence of Jesus at the centre of our lives and at the heart of all creation.

In John's Gospel, Philip sums up the deep longing of every human heart when he approaches Jesus and says, "Show us the Father?" (*John 14:9*)

We come together in worship in order that our eyes may be open to see God's presence in all of life. Church is the place we come to train our hearts to be receptive to God's presence and action in our lives and in the world. We come together in order that we may see God in one another and may grow more sensitive to the reality of God's presence in all of life.

As we grow in our ability to be sensitive to God's presence, we become more able to bear witness to that presence in the world around us. We become the light of Jesus who said to his followers, "You are the light of the world." (*Matthew 5:14*)

I pray that we may feel encouraged to know the presence of God's Spirit at work in all of life and to live as the light of Christ in the world.

St. Philip Anglican Church Dates

1953 – two residential lots (one donated) acquired by St. Mary the Virgin Anglican Church on the corner of Neil and Eastdowne

1954 (Aug. 22) – cornerstone laid for The Carnarvon Church Hall 2928 Eastdowne Rd. by The Venerable A.E. deL. Nunns, Rector of St. Mary, Oak Bay – intended to serve as satellite Sunday School facility for St. Mary the Virgin Oak Bay

1955 (Jan. 19) – Carnarvon Church Hall dedicated as a church

1955 (Feb.) – Sunday School enrollment = 162, eventually peaks at 360 children in Sunday School

1955-57 – John Snowden **Rector**

1957-60 – Richard Mugford **Rector**

1960 – St. Philip becomes a self-supporting parish

1960-67 – Rusty Wilkes **Rector**

Jim Davenport Assistant (1965-68)

1967-74 – John Vickers **Rector**

Cyril Venable Occasional Assistant
Will Dobson Assistant (1971-74)

1974-93 – Neil Robinson **Rector**

1975 – Commissioning and installation of Mary Filer windows

1976 (May 1) – Consecration of St. Philip Church

Ken Collinson Assistant (1976-77)

Charles Wolff Assistant (1977-94)

Bill George Associate (1981-83)

1983 (March 1) - present Mary Newbury Organist/Choir Director

Barry Wyckham Assistant (1984-85)

Robert Warren Curate (1987-87)

Christopher Page Associate (1987-93)

1993 (Nov. 14) - present Christopher Page **Rector**

Kevin McKee Occasional Assistant (1997 to 2006)

Gillian Fosdick Parish Worker (Oct. 1996 – present)

1997/98 – Christopher on 12 month sabbatical

Rodney May Occasional Assistant (2000-2002)

Harry Eerkes Assistant (2005 - present)

2006 (Jan. 16) – Christopher appointed Diocesan Archdeacon

2009 (Sept. – Dec.) – Christopher sabbatical, Bob Baillie fill-in

2010/2001 – Discussions re: amalgamation with St. Mary

The Church That Children Built

*Then little children were being brought to him
in order that he might lay his hands on them and pray.
The disciples spoke sternly to those who brought them;
but Jesus said, 'Let the little children come to me,
and do not stop them;
for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs.'*
(Matthew 19:13,14)

*At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked,
'Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?'
He called a child, whom he put among them, and said,
'Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children,
you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.'*
(Matthew 18:1-3)

When land was purchased by the Anglican Church of St. Mary at the corner of Neil Street and Eastdowne in 1954, there was no intention of building another church. The Church Hall built on the two properties was intended to accommodate children for Sunday School, Scouts, Guides, and young people for social and recreational activities.

It quickly became apparent that parents who were intended to drop off their children at the corner of Neil and Eastdowne on their way to church at St. Mary the Virgin on Elgin 2kms. away, preferred to worship where their children were attending Sunday School. So, Sunday School was soon held downstairs at 2928 Eastdowne Rd. and upstairs was transformed into church.

Since those days, children have been an integral part of St. Philip Anglican Church. We aim to continue the tradition of joining Jesus in making children welcome and allowing them to model the way to "enter the kingdom of heaven."

Children offer us a vision of what it means to follow Christ with openness, spontaneity, and abundant life and joy. They inspire our hearts to open to one another in purity and love.

St. Philip the Apostle

The Christian community that has met to worship at the corner of Neil and Eastdowne for the past 56 years is named after Philip the Apostle. He should not be confused with Philip the Evangelist whose story is told in the book of Acts.

Little is known about Philip the Apostle. In the Synoptic Gospels he only appears as a name in the list of Apostles.

Philip appears four times in the Gospel of John:

1:43-46 – Philip comes from Bethsaida in Galilee. Upon being called to follow Jesus he finds Nathanael and encourages him to come and see Jesus.

6:1-14 – Jesus, being followed by a large crowd, asks Philip, "Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?" Philip replies, "Six months' wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little."

12:21,22 – Some Greeks come to worship. They approach Philip saying, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." Philip goes and tells Andrew; together they inform Jesus.

14:6-9 – Philip says to Jesus, "Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied." Jesus admonishes Philip saying, "Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me?"

Philip appears to have understood that the longing of the human heart is to live in relationship to God.

Philip's name in Greek means, "lover of horses." Love is the way we see God. When we love, our hearts open to the presence and action of God at work in our lives and in the world. To be a church named after St. Philip the Apostle is to be a church that chooses to love.