

## CLOSING ST. THOMAS'

by Brian Ruttan

On a Thursday morning, just before Christmas 1994, Walter Asbil, the Bishop of Niagara, telephoned to invite me to lunch later that day. We agreed to meet at Pappas' Restaurant at 12:30. I immediately called a couple of friends I had agreed to meet at that time to re-book. The parish of the Church of St. Thomas was only one block from the Synod Office in downtown Hamilton. It was not unusual for me to lunch with members of the diocesan staff but the short notice certainly raised my curiosity. Perhaps the Bishop had a new parish in mind for me.

St. Thomas' was built in 1869 on marshy land on the outskirts of the city. It was made to last with blocks of Niagara escarpment limestone and is guarded on the northeast by a square fortress bell tower. The building has much in common with many English village churches. Because of a fire at Christ's Church Cathedral, the first Bishop of Niagara, Thomas Brock Fuller, was consecrated at St Thomas' in 1875. The pine pews were hand made on site. All twelve stained glass windows, some of which are very fine, were installed before 1890. In the early part of the twentieth century the chancel was extended, in response to a new emphasis on the frequent celebration of the Eucharist, and a matching parish hall was added. The parish grew as housing moved out from central Hamilton with a solid prospering middle class core. The legacy from the first half of the century was a sense of importance in the life of the diocese and the city, and about \$800,000 in endowments.

Hamilton is a steel town with a reputation for acrid air and grime. In the 1950's and 60's many families decided to move to the suburbs for fresher and cleaner surroundings. While many

continued to travel back to the old parish on Sundays, it was the beginning of a slow downward trend in worship attendance.

The neighbourhood had changed significantly by the time of my arrival in December 1990. The largest segment of population was seniors living in the large complex across Main Street on the sight of the old First United Church. Second were families on social assistance living in many run down apartments and rooming houses and third, a large population of psychiatric patients living in group homes and rooming houses. Only a few members of the worshipping community lived in the neighbourhood.

Through the 1970's there had been something of a reprieve. First United Church had burned down in September 1969. The two congregations worked as one for ten years in the St. Thomas' building with the much larger resources and membership of First United sustaining a high level of activity. When this arrangement was ended by the United Church Hamilton Presbytery in favour of amalgamating with another near-by United Church congregation, it was clear that St. Thomas' could not easily sustain itself with the remaining membership. Recognizing this, First United left behind a "sustaining fund" to help out in thin times. In the first year of my incumbency, 1991, this fund quietly ran out. In the next three years the congregation was forced to use endowment funds to cover budget short-falls as well as continuing to depend on investment income for about 1/3 of its revenues. We were the smallest congregation in the diocese with a full-time priest. Average attendance on Sunday was about 60 people at two services.

In what I have described so far, all signs pointed to the inevitable disestablishment of a redundant parish church. However, during the time of the partnership with the First United congregation the Rev'd Roy Wilson and the Rev'd Lois Wilson<sup>1</sup> had helped parishioners begin to

reach out to their neighbourhood community. After the congregations separated, two successive rectors, the Rev'd Eric Howes and the Rev'd Wendy Roy, had provided leadership that fostered and expanded this involvement. The neighbourhood ministry included a Wednesday afternoon program for seniors that was also a chapter of Canadian Pensioners Concerned, an organization dedicated to promoting seniors interests in the formation of Provincial and Federal government policy. This program was headed by a well known colourful Hamilton personality, Maria Cordis, a Roman Catholic Sister of St. Joseph. On Tuesday morning the Friendship Centre operated a drop-in program for psychiatric out-patients which included lunch. The church also provided some very basic office space for this program which operated on different days in five downtown churches. Barb Mersereau, the founder<sup>2</sup>, and Audrey Page, a member of St Thomas', worked tirelessly to coordinate a group of volunteers at each site. Three separate Narcotics Anonymous groups operated through the week as well as a large and long-standing Alcoholics Anonymous gathering on Monday nights. On Thursday evening another 12 step group met: Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous. In addition to these there were Beavers and Cubs for boys and Brownies and Guides for girls, a Craft Club and the parish choir.

During my incumbency there were five new initiatives. Along with the Regional Department of Public Health and the Hamilton Board of Education, the parish sponsored a drama program for high school students which involved their writing, rehearsing, and presenting (in the parish hall and some school auditoria) of a play about a public health issue of concern to teenagers such as safe sex, drugs, violence, racism, etc. A second program developed from the initiative of our parish secretary, Susan Davis, who is a gifted scholar and visual artist. This involved converting the unused church balcony space into a communal art studio particularly for the purpose of promoting new Christian visual art. Third was hosting and sponsorship of the Inner City Dance Collective that offered dance lessons at nominal cost by professional teachers in several styles.

Fourth, Victoria Shepherd, a third year theology student from McMaster Divinity College, came to the parish to do a field education project. She was able to develop two "collective kitchens" using the parish facilities to involve local people in groups that got together to plan and make meals for their families at less than \$1 per serving.

The fifth initiative was hosting a congregation of the Assyrian Church of the East, mostly Iraqi Christians who use Aramaic as their liturgical language. They have lived under persecution for a great deal of their existence most recently under Saddam Hussein.

Finally, St. Thomas' had, for some time, been known as a place where liturgy was done with a sense of exploration and adventure. We were known in the diocese and in Hamilton for liturgical innovation in music, word, and action including a monthly celebration of the main Sunday Eucharist which experimented with gender inclusive language for God. Carman Wilson, a candidate for ordination in the diocese, Dr. Andrea Mann, a professor at McMaster University who was with us as a field education student from the Centre for Christian Studies in Toronto, and Dorothy Johns, a long time lay reader and an honorary Canon of Christ's Church Cathedral, were instrumental in the initial drafting of this service. It was altered and fine tuned as we used it. Music at St. Thomas' was simple but done very well under the direction of Rob Boer and later Roland Packer. The small choir performed some pieces composed by Roland as well as several hymns with texts by me and music by him.

The overall feeling in the congregation was that St. Thomas' was located in a neighbourhood of many needs and few resources. The parish had made significant steps to respond to some of those needs and in doing so had developed a bond with its neighbourhood. The small congregation was highly committed to the parish mission with much higher than usual personal gifts to the parish and personal involvement in its ministry. While some expressed nostalgia for

traditional ways, there was considerable excitement about our liturgical life through which many expressed a sense of being nurtured spiritually. While it was a source of anxiety for some that we were sustained by the financial legacy of the past, there was also a sense that our presence and ministry among the poorest people in the city was not a bad way of using those resources.

After Bishop Walter and I had ordered our spanakopita and salad, we settled into a conversation about St. Thomas' financial situation. The bishop's view was that the prospect was hopeless for any significant resurgence of parish membership and becoming financially self-supporting. I had to agree with this assessment. He felt it would be better to close the parish than to see it slowly die out. I suggested that the ministry was significant enough to be supported if only with a part-time priest. The purpose of the lunch was to inform me that the bishop, supported by the other members of the diocesan senior staff, had decided that St. Thomas' must be disestablished and closed, proposing the first Sunday in October for a final service. We agreed that I would inform the congregation of this decision at the Annual Vestry<sup>3</sup> in January (1995), move toward a Special Vestry in the Spring at which the congregation would vote on a motion of voluntary disestablishment (2/3 majority required), and, given sufficient support for the motion, move toward closure in October. The bishop also talked about my personal future. After closing the parish he proposed that I move to the Cathedral Parish for a period of 9 months to a year with the hope that the parishioners of St. Thomas' would accompany me there and make it their new parish home.

As I walked back to the church along the grey slush covered sidewalk, a tight undigested ball of phylo, spinach and feta made any thoughts difficult. I realized that while I had spoken about the possibility of closure I had never really believed that it would happen during my incumbency. I felt I had received several heavy body blows to my personal commitments and to the parish and

people I had grown to love, even to my ideals of what the Church should be about. I felt angry, sad, guilty that this must be my fault somehow, and afraid. I was in a state of shock.

Part of my fear was connected to the memory of attending the closing service of another parish in the city about a year before. We were greeted by a group of placard carrying protestors outside the church. The church organ had been sabotaged and disabled. The dissenting group later formed a new congregation and soon affiliated with an independent Anglican organization that supported their insistence on the use of the 1959 revision of the Book of Common Prayer, and an exclusively male clergy. My fear was that the process of closing down St Thomas' might be just as conflicted.

It was a month until the Annual Vestry at the end of January. I did not want to carry the burden of the bad news alone so I shared it, confidentially, with Dorothy Johns, the parish layreader, and the wardens, John Ellis and Kathy Dubecki. I began to live the dilemma of a priest caught between my institutional function as the bishop's representative in the parish, and pastor to my community. I felt split by these two loyalties. I occupied this difficult position for the next 16 months trying to engage both sides as seriously as I could.

At the Annual Vestry, I delivered the news to the thirty or so members present, and proposed a Special Vestry for the first Sunday in June to consider the proposal that we agree to the disestablishment of the parish. There was little immediate comment except for questions of clarification about the process we were to follow.

When the parish council met a few days later the atmosphere was depressed. Members mostly shared their disbelief that such a thing could happen. There was some concern for my future should the parish close. I explained that the bishop was proposing we all move together to the

Cathedral. This suggestion was met with several defiant and derisive comments. I made a verbal commitment to remain in the parish until the closure was complete.

As we moved toward the June Special Vestry, people were struggling out loud about their vote. They also struggled with the process itself. It was difficult to grasp that the options were to close voluntarily or be closed. Many people worked to defeat the motion under the illusion that the parish would then stay open.

At the end of February the bishop came to address a congregational meeting and answer questions. Bishop Asbil met the distress of the parishioners with compassion, returning their hostility with understanding, letting us know his own grief in closing such a historic church. At the same time there was a firmness in his presentation that left no doubt about the outcome. It may be possible to extend the time to a later closing, he suggested, but in months rather than years. The possibilities of a half-time priest and of twinning with another parish were ruled out. Most of the concern of the parishioners was with the many ministry groups working in the parish and with the memorials especially the stained glass. The bishop tried to reassure us that every effort would be made to find alternative accommodation for ministry groups and promised an orderly disposal of moveable objects in the church. It felt, some said, like confirmation of a terminal diagnosis.

The end result of this meeting for the people of St. Thomas was a strong sense of the determination of the diocese to disestablish the parish, if not in October, certainly not after 1996. In this there was some confidence that care would be taken of the property and its artifacts when the building was finally vacated and that every effort would be made to continue those ministries related to our neighbourhood. For many people as they talked among themselves and with me there was an emerging sense that perhaps the time had come to give up the struggle to keep St.

Thomas' going. Some had argued this route for several years. Others were not convinced that the neighbourhood ministries were transportable even a few blocks. And some simply could not conceive of life without this particular parish church. There began to be talk of the diocese' real motive in closing St. Thomas': "so they can get their hands on our money". With the building of the new diocesan centre, Cathedral Place, and the pressure to relieve the financial burden of several newer congregations who had large capital debts this speculation grew among parishioners and even outside observers of the parish.

During the time leading up to the June 2 Special Vestry meeting, conversations in my pastoral contacts tended to hover among anger and disbelief that St. Thomas' should be closing, more strategic conversations about what the real motives were for closure, and how we might find a way to keep the parish open. The elements of "anger", "denial" and "bargaining" led me to ponder what sort of process we were in. It was like the process of our own death <sup>4</sup> in some ways, and also like grieving the death of a much loved member of the family. For some it felt like having part of oneself amputated. That we would no longer exist as a community after the closing date was crucial for me. This was, in fact, the death of this community, and at least a part of ourselves. We needed to enter this process of termination consciously and actively. We were in a grief/dying process as we struggled to come to terms with the reality of our loss, and deal with the pain attached to it. Members of the community would need to adjust to an environment without their parish church and community and move on to join new church communities. <sup>5</sup>

I have always encouraged the telling of stories as part of my pastoral ministry. Stories culminate in myth, the container of the soul of a community, the meaning of its life. The true character of a community emerges from the stories people tell. A crucial way in which a dying person comes to

acceptance of their death is by telling the stories of their life and in doing so approaching its meaning. Acceptance of death hinges on celebration of a life fully lived and an acceptance of many failures and unfulfilled possibilities. Consequently I began to be more intentional in encouraging the telling of stories of parish and neighbourhood life.

The Special Vestry of June 2 began with the proposal, moved and seconded, to ask the Bishop of Niagara to proceed to disestablish the parish of the Church of St. Thomas with a closing service on the afternoon of October 16, 1995. There was almost no discussion of the motion among the 110 people present. They had come with their minds made up and ready to vote. When the vote was taken by secret ballot the result was a 50% split. Since a 2/3 majority was necessary to carry the vote, the resolution was defeated. We were not about to commit suicide.

In subsequent conversations some said their negative vote was a message of protest at the process itself in the hope that alternative ways might be considered of keeping the ministries of the parish alive if not the parish itself. However, the catch of the canonical referendum process particular to Niagara diocese was that a vote to commit suicide would have given the congregation involvement in and some control of the disestablishment process. The negative vote, according to canon, meant that our fate as a parish community would pass into the hands of an ad hoc Episcopal Commission. The bishop, however, decided to postpone any action for a few months. He proposed a new and tentative closing date: the Sunday after Easter, 1996.

The summer months were filled with many conversations about ways in which the Church of St. Thomas could continue. What began to emerge was a strange combination of a stronger resolve to fight for the continuation of the church, and a sense that there was nothing that was going to alter the bishop's resolve to close it down. While we still experienced the disbelief and

anger, we were entering the bargaining stage of our dying, seeking to argue more clearly for our continuation and putting together new deals for survival. At the same time we were beginning to experience the depression of a dawning understanding that we were terminal. The reality of our situation was gradually taking hold.

Susan Davies, the parish secretary, solicited letters from the mission groups using the building, arguing for the strategic placement of the Church of St. Thomas for their work. These were collected and sent to the Bishop.

Susan Westall, a warden from All Saints Church, a parish of about the same vintage at the other end of town, on her own initiative, began talking to the Bishop and those involved in the parish neighbourhood ministry programs with a view to forming an independent cooperative which would continue to use the facilities after closure of the parish in service of the neighbourhood. The idea was a neighbourhood house modelled after urban missions in Great Britain, and also a modest reflection of St. Matthew's House, a significant Anglican social service agency in Hamilton, whose director was a former rector of St Thomas'. While there was some initial enthusiasm in principle, it soon became apparent that the upkeep of the facilities was beyond the potential financial capacity of the community ministry groups on their own.

The real significance of the parish worshipping community as an essential support for the community ministries became very clear as options were explored. The parish depended on the many neighbourhood volunteers to join with parish members in managing and operating the programs. At the same time, all these groups depended for their continuation on the financial and real estate resources of the parish as well as the spiritual support of the congregation. There

was a symbiosis. We all discovered in a conscious way how much we had needed one another all along.

The `vultures' began to gather as news spread of the near death of the Church of St. Thomas. We began to receive letters requesting linens, service and hymn books, processional crosses, light fixtures, silver chalices and ciboria, office equipment, sound equipment etc. As well, people came to visit and look as prospective purchasers of the grand Cassavant Freres organ or the building itself. I found myself fending off newspaper reporters wanting to cover the last wedding at the church.

As summer continued, I was thinking about ways we could move more fully into the depressing reality of our end as a parish and open up the possibility of acceptance and resolution so that members of the community might be better prepared for the adjustment to life without St. Thomas' and ready to move on to join other congregations. I began to have more conversations about where people could find a new church home that would fit their needs. This fit the analogy of grieving the death of a loved one rather than coming to terms with our own death. People were beginning to separate themselves from the parish. Trying on new parishes was one way in which people began to move toward adjusting to a world with out their familiar parish community and moving on to a new church involvement.

With the help of some long-time parish members, I assembled a list of the living clergy who had served in the parish and also children of the parish who had gone on to be ordained in the church. The list was not exhaustive I now realize but it didn't need to be. I wrote to each of the people on this list inviting them to suggest a date when they could visit the parish, preach a sermon and share a meal at some time during the Fall, Winter and Spring leading up to the new

proposed closing date, the Sunday after Easter. Some never responded. Others declined to come and six of them proposed dates from which we were able to arrange a series of guest preachers from October 1995 through to March 1996. I asked each one to speak personally about their experience of St. Thomas' but gave no other direction.

To tell the truth I didn't really know enough about what I was doing in order to give directions. I had some idea about telling the story of our life together in the parish, of myth making, of simply reminiscing, of celebrating the ministry of the Church of St. Thomas, as ways of summarizing and bringing closure to our life together. I had also read and enjoyed Robertson Davies' novel *Murder and Walking Spirits*<sup>6</sup> in which the cuckolded and murdered hero enters death to find that his eternal journey begins with a series of "movies" telling his personal and family history and revealing the mysteries of his life. The first order of business, he realizes, is to discover the meaning of the life he has lived; a variation on the idea that one's whole life flashes across one's mind at the point of death. My understanding of what was happening to us took shape around what each visitor presented and in what memories and associations the parishioners had in response to them.

An early visitor was the Rev'd Richard Ruggle, rector of St. Paul's Church, Norval, in the Diocese of Niagara, who also devoted part of his time to military chaplaincy. Rick had grown up in St. Thomas' parish and its neighbourhood. Without knowing or intending it, he made a wonderful contribution to our termination process by talking in colourful detail about the life of the parish and the neighbourhood of his boyhood. At one point he turned to the choir and pointed to Carman Wilson, our lone bass, and recalled their standing there together nearly fifty years ago as choir boys dressed in red cassock, surplice and ruffles. Rick's rich evocation helped open up other people's memories and piqued the interest of relative new comers enough to listen to the stories, look at the old photographs and service bulletins.

The trail was cut by Rick. Subsequent preachers were heard in a similar way and gradually we built up a collective memory of who we were as a community. The Rev'd Dr. Roy Wilson and The Rev'd Dr. Lois Wilson, who had been the ministers of First United Church during and after their fire, visited in the Octave of Prayer for Christian Unity (late January 1996). This visit afforded the opportunity for a reunion of the joint First United and St Thomas congregation of the 1970's.

Roy, along with some others of our visitors, tried to help us recognize and accept that our time was up. We were no longer viable as a congregation. Feeling vital still, however, made it difficult to hear these pronouncements. As time went on the majority of members, even those who had previously felt we should look seriously at closing, were increasingly convinced that our work was not yet finished. While the purpose of our series of guest preachers was to celebrate who we had been and help us come to terms with our end, becoming aware of who we really were as a historic community made us more reluctant to roll over and die. There was, I think, a growing sense that many were prepared to close if that should be the outcome, but there was also a new enthusiasm for our ministry should we be able to remain open and together.

In January of 1996 we gathered for what would be the final Annual Vestry of the Church of St. Thomas. Bishop Walter had asked that we return to the question of voluntary closure. Unanimously, the members present recorded their opposition to the disestablishment of the parish while at the same time committing themselves to accept the Bishop's decision. In other words, we made it clear that we did not want the parish to close but if it did we would not initiate any rearguard protest action. While this decision reflected the genuine passion people felt for the parish and its ministry, it was also strategic. Our refusal to close voluntarily meant that the Bishop would now appoint a commission of inquiry into the parish. A third opinion was our best hope of staying open.

Following the diocesan canons, Bishop Walter moved to appoint the commission of inquiry charged to investigate the condition of the Church of St. Thomas and bring a recommendation to the Synod Council as to whether it should be disestablished and closed or continue as it was. The Commission members examined the financial state of the parish, interviewed the wardens, lay delegate to Synod and the parish administrator, and talked with many who were leaders of the parish outreach programs. As a group they met with the Parish Council in a meeting open to any concerned parish member. The members of the Commission expressed considerable interest in the parish and its ministry. They were surprised and impressed by the diversity, quantity and quality of ministry in its neighbourhood. They noted with admiration the strong adventurous liturgical life of the parish, especially the use of experimental texts for the Eucharist. One member, a woman priest, indicated that she would be enthusiastic about attending worship at the parish if not otherwise engaged on Sundays. At the same time, they expressed concern about the low numbers of worshippers on Sundays and, as a result, the inability of the parish to sustain itself financially. Members of the Parish Council pointed out that there were ample financial resources available to support ministry in the parish using existing volunteers and moving to a part-time priest. Members of the commission appeared sympathetic to such a solution.

As a gathered community we caught a glimmer of hope from this meeting. Individually some members of the commission took me to lunch to express their anguish about the decision they were charged to make. I felt encouraged that some of the commissioners were on the side of the continued existence of the parish. However, the legal minds had loaded the dice again, not this time "kill yourself or be killed" which was the structure of the diocesan canon on closure of a parish, but "live with all faculties or die". The commission's terms of reference were, essentially, to decide whether or not the parish of St Thomas could continue to function with a full-time rector

or not. Bishop Asbil refused to admit any other options to the discussion such as the possibility of a part-time priest.

Archdeacon Moore, the diocesan executive officer, was given the job of helping the ongoing ministry groups find new homes. The Archdeacon of our Undermount Region, Richard Berryman, worked with two long time parishioners, Muriel Skelton and Claude Campbell, to make an orderly dispersal of memorial objects. We began to plan the final services for the Sunday after Easter.

The Lenten Quiet Day for the clergy of the Undermount Region was held at the church. I led the day on the theme: "The meaning of our lives understood in facing our death". The celebration of the Eucharist to end the day had a strong sense of lament for each of us individually, for the St. Thomas' congregation, and for the church as a larger encompassing reality. As we left the church that day I felt the strange combination of a thick sadness and a deep hope. The celebration of the Easter Triduum was rich and full of the same sadness and hope.

Planning the closing services happened at two levels. An Episcopal service of thanksgiving and disestablishment of the parish to be held at 4pm in the afternoon was planned in conjunction with diocesan staff. What I proposed and they accepted with some minor changes was a version of our monthly experimental Eucharist service, with inclusive language for God as well as people, combined with parts of the "Thanksgiving on the Anniversary of a Parish" adapted from the Book of Alternative Services<sup>7</sup>. This included a procession to the baptismal font, pulpit, altar, and lectern, offering prayers of thanksgiving at each. For the prayers at the font I asked Marni Doran, a former parishioner, who had been baptized at St Thomas' in 1912 to participate with Renee Laing a young woman who had been baptized that same day. However, as I sought out

more participants I discovered that very few parishioners were planning to attend. Not attending was partly protest and partly avoiding the pain of the moment of our dying. The afternoon event had become the closing service for non-parishioners.

For the parishioners the closing services on the Sunday morning of April 16 were seen as theirs. It included an adult baptism, the Holy Eucharist, and as much of our favourite music as possible. A television crew turned up at the last minute asking to record the 10:30 am service. I took it upon myself to refuse permission. Our final moments together needed to be protected from disruption by lights and cameras. A community lunch, professionally catered, followed the morning services. People lingered to say their goodbyes as the community gathered for the last time.

For a time, the closing Episcopal Service of disestablishment became a liturgical model for such events in the Canadian church. There is an irony here somewhere.

There is still anger at the closing of the Church of St. Thomas. Nearly four years later, the obituary of one parishioner, Alva Ellis, included a line of protest about it. However, nearly all the parishioners moved to join new parish communities and in them contributed much of the same creative and enthusiastic service that had engaged them at St. Thomas'. The moving on of individuals to new parish involvements indicates, I think, a good measure of adjustment to our death as a community. Nearly everyone was able to adjust to life without St. Thomas' and move on to a new relationship with a different parish community. We moved through our process of dying and grieving not leaving the feelings behind by any means but, I think, coming to acceptance, finding a place to put our memories, and open to the possibility of new life.

Therese Rando writes about "the concept of an appropriate death"<sup>8</sup>. By this she means a death in which the internal conflicts of the terminally ill person, "have been addressed and worked through as much as possible "; that in dying the person maintains a sense of identity; that the dying person attends to unfinished business with significant people; and that some critical concern or wish they have continues in significance or comes to fruition. In so far as an institution and community can attain an appropriate death, St Thomas' termination may be a model. While church communities are notorious for internal conflict, in the context of closing St. Thomas' these became quite insignificant as we faced the end together. The guests who spoke to us of their memories and feelings about the parish helped us come to a renewed and clearer understanding of who we were as a parish in our neighbourhood. The main thread of continuity was the movement of St. Thomas' parishioners to serve and worship in other parishes. Some sense of the sustaining of a critical concern was in the continuation of some of the ministry that was important to the parish and the use of some of the equipment and furnishings in other churches. But most significantly it was the continued trust people had in the church as the community of God's presence.

No dying, however, achieves complete resolution. The major caveat to any suggestion of an appropriate death in the case of St Thomas' arises from the judgement that its closure was an injustice, an expression of short sighted institutional concerns which refused to focus on the significant ways in which the Gospel was being lived out through the parish community among the people in its neighbourhood. The closure of St. Thomas' will always feel like a betrayal of that Gospel. This remains a deep source of grief for me and many others.

Driving past the old building at Victoria and Main, now home to a Carisma, a Portugese Pentecostal congregation, will always have the power to plunge us back into the pain of the

death of our parish community. However, in telling our story I feel that we came to terms with the reality of the closing of our parish and together effectively worked through much of our pain. In particular, those who were closely associated with the St. Thomas' community were able to adjust to their loss and find new ways to exercise their ministries.

#### Notes.

1

later Moderator of the United Church of Canada and President of the Canadian and the World Council of Churches.

2

Barb Mersereau, M.A. Guidelines for Friendship Centres: How You Can Start One. Jackson Station, P.O. Box 57533, Hamilton Ontario, Canada, L8P 4X3.  
e-mail: bmersereau@name.net

3

"Vestry" is the name for official decision making meetings in the parish.

4

Elisabeth Kubler-Ross: On Death and Dying. New York, MacMillan, 1969. This study established the "stages" of the death process. Recent research suggests that Kubler-Ross borrowed extensively and without acknowledgment, from the work of her colleague the Rev. Carl Nighswonger, Chaplain at Billings Hospital in Chicago. Nighswonger's thinking about the process of dying took shape around as many as ten "dramas" in a fluid order rather than five stages in what often appears to be a rather rigid structure. See Heather Robertson, "Dead Wrong". Elm Street. September 1998.

5

William Worden, Grief Counselling and Grief Therapy. (2<sup>nd</sup> edition), Pages 10-18. New York, Springer Publishing, 1991.

6

Toronto, McClelland and Stewart, 1991.

7

Anglican Church of Canada, Toronto, Anglican Book Centre, 1985.

8

Therese Rando, Grief, Dying, and Death. Champaign, Illinois, Research Press Company, 1984. Page 222. The concept of an appropriate death is derived from research published by A.D. Weisman and T. Hackett in 1961, and Weisman's On Dying and Denying, in 1972.

