

As St. Philip Wardens, we want to follow up on our June 8th announcement, in which we suggested engaging in conversations concerning the possibility of St. Philip and St. Matthias moving ahead in ministry as a united community. To that end, we welcome you to join us for the first of likely a series of conversations, in which we will listen carefully to your thoughts and questions about what is, in truth, presently a purely hypothetical notion. We will hold this first conversation from 11:30 AM to 12:30 PM on Sunday, July 27, 2025. We hope those who regularly attend the 8:00 AM worship time will consider returning to participate, but for those unable to do so, we look to you to help us find a time when we might receive your input. Ultimately, we must consider the following question: is the Holy Spirit leading St. Philip to continue its vibrant ministry in our present Neil/Eastdowne building or, alternatively, in the St. Matthias buildings at Richardson/Richmond? Or, perhaps some other option?

In order to facilitate discussion and listening, please consider the following background information.

In a springtime conversation with Fr. Allen, which was followed by a conversation between Bishop Anna and Parish Council, Bishop Anna observed that St. Philip is a numerically strong congregation. However, the St. Philip building is quite limited, particularly in its accessibility. Notably, without main floor facilities, the only wheelchair access to bathrooms is via a long, outdoors path downstairs, a path that involves three sets of doors and gates. Considering it is very unlikely (though not yet proved impossible) to get municipal approval to expand the building footprint, there are very few space options to build a new bathroom. In addition, with Gonzales Pre-School occupying the basement throughout the week for most of the year, there is no place to hold weekday parish or community events other than the church nave; the use of the nave is currently limited by the presence of the fixed pews.

On the other hand, Bishop Anna noted that the St. Matthias congregation is much smaller, and becoming increasingly older and, physically, less able to manage the sizeable physical plant that is St. Matthias. The physical plant includes accessible bathrooms, as well as a detached church hall building and a low-cost seniors' housing complex. Bishop Anna made the simple suggestion that the folks at St. Philip and St. Matthias may wish to discuss if their respective ministry needs, both present and future, may be best met by sharing the St. Matthias buildings. Should both parishes find this to be true, then she has suggested that a significant percentage of the proceeds of the sale of the St. Philip property might be returned to St. Philip to help make some of the inevitable renovations needed at St. Matthias.

Although so much involved in such a discernment is presently unknown, we do want to share some points we feel confident are true:

1. Bishop Anna has not indicated that her wish is for our two parishes merge. She has simply made some observations and offered an option for each to prayerfully consider. At the end of the discernment, we are free to continue in the status quo.
2. We recognize that the actions of several previous bishops have led to significant lingering distrust of the Synod office. However, one of us (Larry) has worked with Bishop Anna for over three years, which included sensitive, candid conversations; he believes she has only the best interests of St. Philip at heart; he feels confident she will honour any decision made after a prayerful discernment process. It is worth noting that Bishop Anna, who has researched change management during her MBA studies, has stated: "we can only move forward at the speed of trust". Building trust, not violating it, seems to be an important part of her ministry. We as Wardens and Fr. Allen are likewise committed to building trust.
3. We have agreed with Fr. Allen that the discernment process will be lay led. Fr. Allen will, of course, provide input and share wisdom gained from many years of building parishes.

4. As Wardens, we are committed to a neutral discernment process. Whilst we may frame the process in terms of 'uniting' two parishes, the discernment at the end might be "yes", or it might equally be "no". We and Fr. Allen are committed to accepting the results.

We recognize that even the very notion of such existential change may be disturbing to many at St. Philip. We recognize that considering such a change, even with much faith and courage, necessitates discerning answers to myriad questions. Much of what we know, and many of the questions we have, will be shared at discernment meetings such as the one taking place on July 27th.

In the end, we know God is sovereign and longs for God's people to thrive and live abundant life. The Kingdom of God is here! Our ongoing challenge is to live as Kingdom people. May our time together on July 27th, and all other discernment times to follow in the coming months, be filled with knowledge of those realities, so that we move together in love.

Blessings,
Judith Armstrong and Larry Anthony
Wardens