

Under the Orange Roof ~ of Raccoons and Reconciliation

On the list among our 125th Anniversary projects from 2019 in Parksville has been the renewal of our cedar shake roof at our iconic St. Anne's site, the oldest public building in the city, and the island's oldest log church.



Early evening light at St. Anne's, Parksville. In the foreground is the resting-place of Bishop Hywel Jones ("Jonesy"), Rector of Parksville 1944-47, Diocesan Bishop 1980-1984 Photo Credit: Andrew Twiddy

This summer's campaign title *Raising the Roof* was riffed from our cathedral in Vancouver, -because the project was similarly about more than just the roof itself. It was, and is, about the programs and people and ministry that happen under the roof, and all around the vicinity and beyond.

A roof is so much more than a roof.

The building in its West Coast Gothic beauty is the outward and visibly acknowledged sign, revered sacramentally with a genuflection of the eyelids and a nod and a smile of the passers-by. The inward and invisible grace is under and all around the beautified combination of new and old, in the stories of lives touched, changed, and inspired for change and transformation, and strengthened for lives of faith and service.

Our recent enhancement of St. Anne's highlights the natural fresh yellow-orange colour of the cedar by day, and as the day declines features the bright LED and low-energy perimeter outline of the building, turning a twilight orange glow to a night-time white brilliance (think the accentuation of the Parliament buildings in Victoria). Our public statement of acceptance of our need to shine a light on the shingle-by-shingle work of reconciliation, and of our commitment as Anglican Church of Canada to the task.

We honour the fact that our community gathers on the traditional lands of the Pentlatch- and Hul'qumi'num-speaking peoples, forebears of the Qualicum and Snaw-Naw-As First Nations.

In true Anglican middle-ground style, the first wedding at St. Anne's in 1896 was between a Coast Salish widow, Sarah Coqulammat, and Qualicum Beach's first settler, Irish Catholic Thomas Kinkade, and conducted by the first Anglican priest for the parish, Charles Cooper. Perhaps a further part of the beauty of having cedar logs from the 1890s and local cedar shakes hand-cut for the 2020s, is that we can continue to marry and connect a sacred symbol to a sacred symbol, the medicinal tree of our ancestors on the land and watersheds where we live, and the medicine of a message of transformation for a country in need of truth-telling and reconciliation.

How did we get here? Giving matters, and good ministry matters, and we need to keep talking to each other about it. *Raising the Roof* is one key initiative in a whole range of program and enhancement projects in which we have been engaging at St. Anne & St. Edmund, over a 10-year arc, in symbolic increments of \$125,000. For the inquiring, we are currently around the \$500,000 mark, having raised \$150,000 this summer as we move piecemeal towards a target of \$1,250,000.

In all of our institutional fragility, we Anglicans know that we depend fully on the dynamism of authentic relations in the community, public philanthropy and generosity, and sacrificial and extraordinary acts of resolve and generosity from friends and members alike, including bequests and planned giving instruments. We are so tremendously grateful for all our donors, near and far, and for all our donations at every level of giving. Who knows what sacrifices lie behind these transfers of loving energy, converting intentions into new patterns of reality and signs of hope?

No tale of the St. Anne's roof would be complete with the innovative contributions of our winged and four-legged friends and wild creatures. We have lived comfortably for many years with nesting birds living out the vocation given to them by the psalmist, to find a home above the altars of the Holy One (Psalm 84), and chirp and cheep away during prayers now and again. I imagine the diary of many country priests could also encompass church mice and bats in the belfry within the routine and rhythm of accumulated stories, but I would have to say that it is outside the range of my early life to imagine that one day I would be making a record of bears in the churchyard, or raccoons in the rafters. The bears simply pass through on a rare occasion, but the raccoons are another matter, and it is to them that we owe a debt of more urgent motivation for our newly-roofed estate.

'Twas once upon a summer Sunday morning where I came to notice that the clumping of footsteps above me in the attic was much more than a mouse. Our friends the raccoons had begun ripping off our aging and paper-thin roof shakes, to set about the task of nesting. I little realized, however, that our choir practice that morning would fulfil Isaiah's vision of a temple full of smoke, yet of a kind where the seraphim may have covered their eyes for more than one reason. As we began to gather in the chancel, our dear four-leggeds decided to empty their bladder directly above the chandelier in the chancel, leading to an explosion of light bulbs and a fiery emission of incense from the unhappy coincidence of a stream of living water cascading down to the carpet below, and a live and active electrical wire suspended above our heads. I gave the abandon ship order, turned off the power, and we all processed down to safety in the lower regions of St. Edmund's on the other side of our churchyard. We knew we really had to gently help our friends find a new home (radio music, squirt guns, and bright light

seemed to be the alternatives to a trap!), and then find ourselves a new covering overhead.

Hardware such as seating, heating, and roofing all capture the eye and memory with beauty, warmth and comfort. That's the visible and tangible good that enables our ministry with people. There IS more. In recent years, for all the setbacks and adaptation required by a pandemic context, the tangible practical benefits as well as intangible spiritual benefits of our fundraising campaign have been there. There through teamwork and staffing, there for the training and mentoring of a youth team by means of employment and volunteering, there through programs of inclusive teaching and music for spiritual growth, and there through partnerships in the community that help feed the hungry and house the homeless. We are not done yet.

When it comes to being faithful to both past and future, William Morris's "keep only that which you know to be useful or believe to be beautiful" gives us a practicality of aesthetics and function. Let's have both, and be both. That way we can go on being our own unique local contribution of healing cedar that our beloved St. Anne's symbolizes ~ under the cloud of the Presence by day, offering a meaningful orange glow by twilight, and providing a firmly enduring and boldly-lit covering for the crisis-soaked night-time of our stormy world.

~ ends ~

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4-minutes of reading

Additional photos by Andrew Twiddy:



Photo credit: Andrew Twiddy



