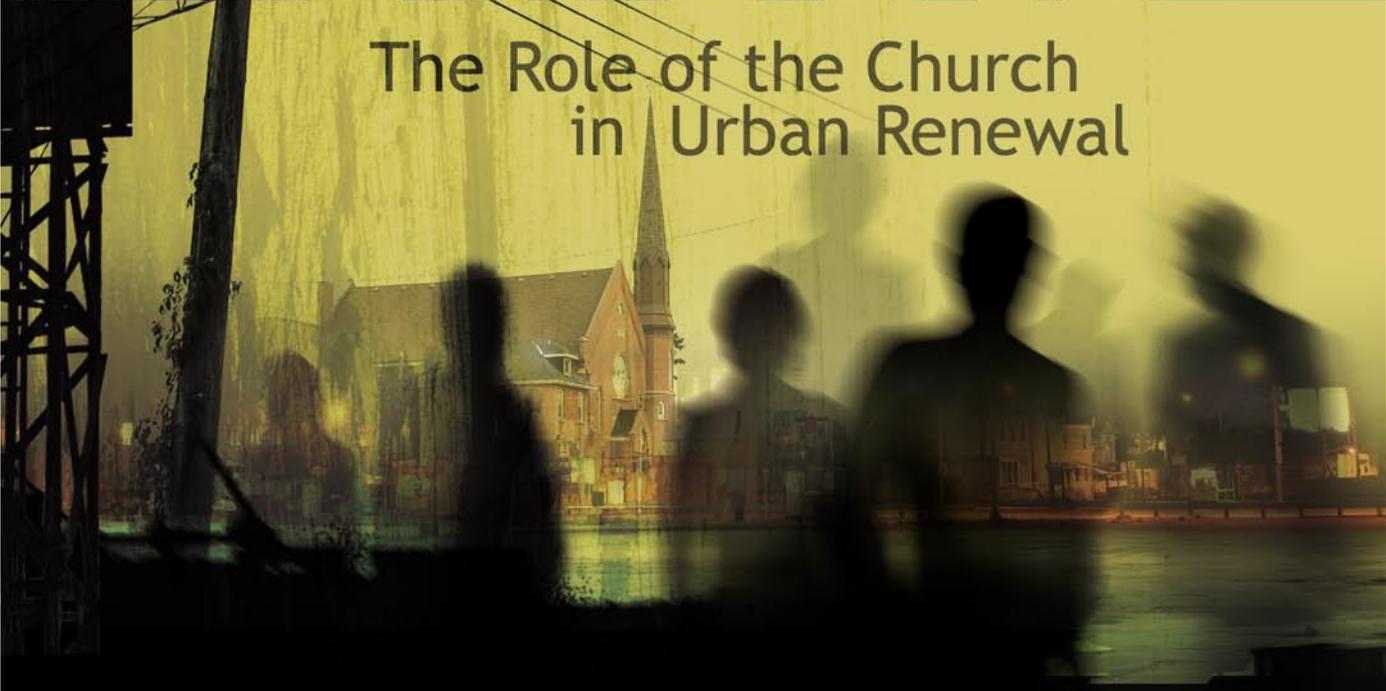




**AUTHORS:** MICHAEL VAN PELT • RICHARD GREYDANUS

# LIVING on the Streets

The Role of the Church  
in Urban Renewal



A WORK RESEARCH FOUNDATION WHITE PAPER

# LIVING on the Streets

**THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH IN URBAN RENEWAL**

A Work Research Foundation White Paper

By Michael Van Pelt and Richard Greydanus

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# PREFACE

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In our individualized society, an institution tends to be viewed as an accumulation of the individuals who compose it. The church, for example, is seen as a group of like-minded individuals who meet together to have their religious needs met.

There is more to any institution than what it provides its members. Institutions have a place in society, and their existence also affects those who are not members – the broader community. This report focuses on that connection between the Church and the City, with a particular focus on urban renewal.

This White Paper is designed for at least two audiences:

- 1) Municipal, community and business leaders. We want to challenge you to understand how important the institution of the church is to the social and economic health of your cities; and
- 2) Leaders in faith communities. We want to challenge you as well to see far-reaching opportunities for mission in the context of economic and cultural urban vibrancy.

We hope this report spurs further interest, discussion and research into the relationship of the church to urban renewal. The church represents, we believe, vast and untapped opportunities for the academy, business and government spheres to explore in their shared goal of restoring their urban landscapes.

We hope you enjoy and find value in this report, and we welcome your feedback. As a think tank, our task is to provoke conversation and discussion, with a view to developing new solutions to existing problems. I am confident that this document will accomplish that mission.

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# Argument

## 1. INTRODUCTION: POSING THE CONTEMPORARY PROBLEM

Will Wright, one of the founding partners of the Walnut Creek, California-based Maxis Software, helped to rewrite the manual on how to make computer games. His highly-successful “Sims” franchise – including the hit game *SimCity*, and the recent best-seller spin-off *The Sims* – doesn’t quite fit the orthodox computer gaming mould. A *SimCity* player spends all his time tending to the needs of a growing city. There is no actual criterion for victory, and the game could go on forever.

When Wright originally pitched his idea, game publishing executives didn’t anticipate a significant market for such a unique gaming concept. They doubted Wright could produce a viable, sellable product. (*Keighley*) But the huge success of the “Sims” franchise has clearly established a popular new genre, pioneered by Wright. Evidently a lot of gamers enjoy being caretakers of virtual populations.

The comparison can only be made in the loosest sense, but this investigative report is meant to speak to the same type of unfilled niche. Our purpose here is to explore the role of established religious communities in local economic development and renewal. We work on the assumption that what people ultimately believe influences how they live their lives, how they invest their money, and how that finds expression in the institution of the church.

Before *SimCity* is left behind in the introduction, it can be used to illustrate why this investigation is valuable. The game is designed on the premise that the economic strength of a city is contingent upon balancing the demands of citizen’s residential, commercial, and industrial interests, as well as providing good access to basic civil services. Schools, police stations, water towers, and hydro lines all need to be built, and land needs to be zoned. All of this is for the purpose of making sure the city remains economically vibrant – in a word, healthy.

Now, the original game, *SimCity Classic*, did not include churches among the buildings spontaneously generated in response to the player’s zoning decisions. In the game’s substantially-improved second edition, *SimCity 2000*, a nondescript church was included among the residential building set. Interestingly, the third installment, *SimCity 3000*, eliminated churches from game play again.

<sup>1</sup>For example: [http://simcity.ea.com/obe/Building\\_Exchange.html](http://simcity.ea.com/obe/Building_Exchange.html).

In the long run, however, the presence of churches matters very little in the game. In the overall structure of game play, the spiritual or religious concerns of the simulated citizens have no role to play. The question that begs to be asked is this: Do churches, or established religious communities, have a role to play in an actual human city?

Today's urban planning departments, business development communities, and city governments are uncertain as to what to do with churches. Again, *SimCity* bears this out.

Trying to grant their gamers as much control and playability as possible, the *SimCity* production team allows users to design their own buildings for in-game use.<sup>1</sup> There are internet communities devoted to sharing thousands of user-developed buildings, a few of which are churches. But a problem arises for intrepid designers when they have to categorize their church in one of *SimCity*'s predefined categories. They can be defined either as "Residential," or under the generic category, "Other," neither of which are satisfying.

The same shortsighted urban planning language can be seen in current economic development and urban renewal trends. The language of civil and business leadership fails to express adequately the important functions served by church communities.

## **VISION 2020, THE CITY OF HAMILTON'S LONG-TERM DEVELOPMENT PLAN, INCLUDES ALMOST NO REFERENCES TO CHURCHES.**

This is not to say that businesses and governments have no dealings with churches. As this report will show, this is demonstrably false. Not enough care has been taken in choosing language to classify urban landscapes. While it is true that language defines reality, it also has the ability to hide reality. The present language of urban planning and economic development fails to comprehend the vital role played by churches in urban centres. Or, when attempts are made to classify established religious communities, their descriptions are impoverished and their public roles reduced to "limited social services providers." Lacking the language to express the true character of churches, we miss significant opportunities to better understand the realities of urban life, and to better serve the needs of our cities.

The city of Hamilton, Ontario will be used as a case study. The portion of Hamilton that will draw all of our attention is bounded by provincial Highway 403 to the west, the brow of the Niagara Escarpment to the south, the shores of Burlington Bay to the north and the city boundaries of Stoney Creek to the east. This can generally be described as the urban centre of Hamilton, or the downtown. Within these boundaries more than 140 active churches, synagogues, mosques, and temples are found. The risk of ignoring such a significant presence in Hamilton's long-range urban development plans is considerable.

The vulnerabilities and inadequacies of language become ever more apparent in the context of grand visions and strategies. *VISION 2020*, the city of Hamilton's long-term development plan, includes almost no references to churches. One reference is found in a forty-two-page document, "Vibrant, Healthy, Sustainable Hamilton," with a single sentence referring to the "need to support the role of spirituality and morality in embracing and supporting *VISION 2020*" (*Planning and Development Department*, 2003, 18.). This is the only even oblique reference to faith communities

we have discovered in Hamilton's plan for urban renewal. *VISION 2020* gives us no reason to think about faith communities as institutions with a vital, ongoing role to play in the city's growth and health. Rather, it uses the language of privatized faith – faith that is left on the kitchen counter before leaving for work in the morning. This report challenges such assumptions, arguing that an accurate understanding of the city depends on broader and more reflective language.

The terms “church” and “established religious community” have been used interchangeably up to this point. While the focus of this report will be on churches, it is important to consider faith communities generally. Indeed, the many incarnations of the Christian church in Canada as an aggregate claim a much longer history than any other established religious community. Jewish communities have also existed in Canada for quite some time, but always in relatively small numbers. Recent years have seen other faiths, including Islam and Hinduism, establish themselves following immigration to Canada by members of these faith communities. Keeping these general considerations in mind, this report contends that churches and the communities of faith that form around synagogues, mosques and other places of worship best reflect the ideals of the New Urbanist movement. The focus, however, will remain on churches.

A gradual shift in scholarship since the mid-20th century towards what might be called a fuller understanding of humanity will be discussed in Part I from a number of different fields including sociology, economics, and urban design. In Part II, how well this shift in scholarly perspective accounts for the everyday experience of community leaders in Hamilton, Ontario. Finally, the report will consider what the findings mean for the future of established religious communities in other urban centres.

## 2. CHANGING HORIZONS IN SCHOLARSHIP

In very recent years, there has been an effort among circles of scholars to recover a more human perspective on how life should be lived. Leading thinkers are considering anew the importance of community, and are finding a place for faith and spirituality in public life. Urban planning departments in cities across North America are putting the ideas of New Urbanism to good use, while economists are investigating social, human and, recently, spiritual forms of capital. As will

be shown, the church possesses a unique capacity to draw these two different modes of thought together into a productive relationship.

### **NEW URBANISTS RETHOUGHT HOW NEIGHBOURHOODS COULD BE DESIGNED TO ENCOURAGE THE DEVELOPMENT OF WHAT THEY BELIEVED THE SUBURBS HAD LOST.**

#### A. NEW URBANISM

Suburban sprawl has been blamed for many social ills, including the degradation of many cities' downtown cores. It is a classic tale: those with the money to invest got out. They moved to the suburbs and bought into the dream of owning a home, complete with backyard, barbeque, and white picket fence.

New Urbanists are those who don't eagerly join in this middle- and upper-class flight to the suburbs. The New Urbanism movement became very popular in the 1980s and early 1990s, and continues to affect today's cities – some artificially, some very intentionally. Proponents of this

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## a DOWNTOWN Foothold

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A decade ago, Hughson Street Baptist Church was dying. Most of its members drove downtown each Sunday morning to attend church; few lived closed by. Their community impact: small. The membership seriously considered closing its doors, possibly relocating to Hamilton's suburbs.

Ten years have restored life to the church. When Pastor Dwayne Cline was brought in as pastor in 1994, he and the church leadership made a conscious decision to focus their energies on serving the wider Hughson Street neighbourhood. That decision has revitalized the congregation, and given it new profile in the neighbourhood.

Today, Hughson Street claims 150 regular attendees, with approximately 70% living within walking distance of the church. Much of their growth has come from a surrounding community impressed with the church's many outreach programs.

Ten to fifteen hours per week of community service are required of Hughson staffers, many of which are spent volunteering at Benetto Public Elementary School across the street. When the school is in need of people to oversee a track and field day, the church often receives a call. A program flyer published by the church lists more than two dozen outreach programs.

Cline also has involved himself at City Hall, particularly in the discussion surrounding the development of Hamilton's North End. He fights for displaced lower-income households, and helps policymakers find ways to keep downtown housing affordable.

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new way of thinking about urban planning feared that the very structure of sprawling suburbs, with its forced reliance on the automobile to do even the most basic things like shop for groceries or grab a coffee, was undermining the human ability to form community. Responding to an apparent attack on the human need for community, New Urbanists rethought how neighbourhoods could be designed to encourage the development of what they believed the suburbs had lost.

Perhaps the most important feature of the reconceived neighbourhood was "walkability." Every home was to be within a five minute walk of the community's centre, where access to a public transit system and shops capable of supplying a family's basic needs could be found. This feature was meant to encourage the development of shared community spirit between residents who would run into each other on the sidewalk. Furthermore, the New Urbanist vision favoured mixed-use communities, a characteristic that naturally followed walkability. Residential and commercial forms of land-use were to share the same space. This was all done to recover what was called a "human-scale" community, and was promoted as the way to revitalize urban centres by making them attractive to a new generation seeking healthy, vibrant communities.

New Urbanism has successfully challenged the reigning orthodoxy among professional urban planners. Today's planners are interested; they like what they see, and they are willing to spend the money to participate. And there is evidence around North America that downtowns are experiencing economic revitalization because of an influx of people searching for a fuller experience of community. As author Eric Jacobsen points out, "From a strictly economic perspective, ,, New Urbanism is a trend that city planners and municipal governments must be aware of simply for its economic impact and its potential for revitalizing formerly problematic areas" (Jacobsen, *Sidewalks in the Kingdom*, 2004).

Appealing as this picture might be, not everyone has bought into the vision of New Urbanism. Its critics

are very quick to point out that aesthetics are emphasized over practicality. But New Urbanism suffers an even more serious criticism as well: that it fails to account for the importance of faith in human life. In a movement driven by an essentially secularized vision, one is very hard-pressed to find a place for the church.

Eric Jacobsen is one such person to point out this oversight. Author of *Sidewalks in the Kingdom* (2003), Jacobsen applauds efforts to rethink and redesign more “human-scale” communities, but wonders if New Urbanism’s failure to incorporate the church will keep it from a future as any more than just an elitist urban fashion.

Consider the question of “mixed-use” land. For New Urbanists, this meant integrating not only residential and commercial property together, but also \$500,000 and \$120,000 homes together – that is, the wealthy and the not-so-wealthy living in relatively close proximity to each other. But one of the most profound criticisms leveled against model New Urbanist communities was that they were simply unaffordable to lower classes. Towns designed on novel principles quickly went the way of fashionable clothing brands: beyond the means of a large proportion of the population. By its very novelty, New Urbanism created bedroom or cottage communities where the wealthy would come for weekends or holidays.

Jacobsen further describes the problem:

The medium of the New Urbanist movement has been the rediscovery of a physical form that engenders community, and the successful application of that form in a contemporary context. [However] the power of the New Urbanist movement is the market (*Jacobsen, 2003, 63*).

Jacobsen contends that when the physical structure of communities is given over to market controls, the problem of “gentrification” – the displacement of lower income residents – cannot be avoided.

Now consider how the church could alleviate this perennial problem for New Urbanist planners. While non-religious institutions like governments sponsor programs capable of helping those with lower incomes find and maintain affordable housing, these institutions usually lack critical, personal touch. The church, however, is the context in which people gather together in community, forging networks of personal relationships. Specializing in the personal touch, the church is uniquely capable of addressing gentrification. As Jacobsen says, “It is the churches and other faith-based groups who have credibility and should be on the forefront of maintaining affordable housing options for the poor” (*Jacobsen, 2004*). A significant finding of the research, and which fits very well with Jacobsen’s expectations, is that communities of faith play a very large role in social justice initiatives.

## B. THE CREATIVE CLASS

Who are the people buying into the New Urbanist vision of a fuller experience of human life? Richard Florida calls them the creative class: “a fast-growing, highly educated, and well-paid segment of the workforce on whose efforts corporate profits and economic growth increasingly depend” (*Florida, 2002*). In his work studying various factors of economic success, Florida developed a series of indexes to measure the economic performance of North American cities. A Creative Index measures a city’s overall economic potential; a High-Tech Index, performance of

the high-tech industry; an Innovation Index, the number of patents per capita; and a Gay Index, the city's openness to different kinds of people and ideas.

If Florida is right, the Creative Index, in conjunction with the sub-indices, can show urban planners for whom their development plans should be geared, for maximum economic growth. Again, it is difficult to miss the fact that no reference to established religious communities can be found. Certainly, Florida accounts for a general sort of spirituality under the inclusive Gay Index. But the church as an institution is much more than a general brand of spirituality; indeed, it could be argued that established religious communities are creative classes in their own right.

### C. SPIRITUAL CAPITAL

Working in association with the Templeton Foundation, Dr. Theodore Malloch heads up an initiative to promote the concept of spiritual capital. In his words, "Spiritual capital is founded on an understanding that all resources are entrusted to people, and both individual persons and groups are called to preserve and develop a wealth of resources for which they are accountable here and later, and which endowments must be managed" (*Malloch*). "Entrusted to people," here, means entrusted to human beings who have values and goals, as do we all. A shorter definition is provided by Robert Woodberry: spiritual capital defines the "resources that are created or people have access to when people invest in religion as religion" (*Woodberry*). What Malloch and Woodberry contend here is that living one's faith brings with it a dramatic effect on how life is lived and how money is spent. That faith holds significant economic implications.

Much of the work currently pursued on spiritual capital is inspired by the work of Max Weber, the late 19<sup>th</sup> century sociologist and author of *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1905). Weber's basic argument was that religious fear inspired hard work was enough to motivate believers to work very hard and "prove" that they were among God's chosen people. Not everyone agrees with the particular way Weber drew his conclusions. And without a doubt, John Calvin never intended his theology to scare people into becoming mere cogs in the capitalist machine.

**INSTITUTIONALIZED EXPRESSIONS OF RELIGIOUS FAITH ARE POISED TO MAKE A COMEBACK, PRECISELY BECAUSE THEIR INSTITUTIONAL EXPRESSION LENDS THEM A MEASURE OF CREDIBILITY.**

But what's important is that Weber drew a concrete connection between faith and economics. By doing so, he helped to ask the questions that the study of spiritual capital now hopes to address.

### D. RESTLESS GODS.

Once known as "Bad News Bibby," for a time University of Lethbridge sociologist of religion in Canada Reginald Bibby had nothing but depressing

reports to offer on the state of religious observance in Canada. By all appearances, theories of secularization were right. Religion was on its way out as a culture-shaper. In fact, the picture was so grim in the 1980s that Bibby himself considered switching his focus to a more exciting field of study to become a sociologist of sports. Organized religion was dying and churches could do nothing to stop it.

But Bibby's 2002 study, *Restless Gods: The Renaissance of Religion in Canada*, suggests that there are some questions about life's purpose and meaning that only the "gods" can answer. In the last decade, Bibby has pointed to a revitalization of religion which he traces in part to the reality that

“the overwhelming majority of Canadians acknowledge that they do raise these so-called ‘ultimate questions’ in the course of living out their lives” (*Bibby, 2002, 93*).

In the words of the American sociologist Peter Berger, “I think what I and most other sociologists of religion wrote in the 1960s about secularization was a mistake. It wasn’t a crazy theory. There was some evidence for it. But I think it was basically wrong. Most of the world today is certainly not secular” (in *Bibby, 2002, 61*).

Even through the lean years of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, established Canadian churches preserved a core of dedicated members – in Bibby’s words “a significant following.” Today, both inside and outside churches, evidence he has gathered indicates that the gods are restless. Organized forms of Christianity – churches – stand to gain the most. It should be noted that Bibby’s study is not limited to churches. What might appear to be

## **CITY GOVERNMENTS AND BUSINESS COMMUNITIES NEED NEW LANGUAGE TO COME TO GRIPS WITH THE IMPACT OF THE INSTITUTIONAL CHURCH.**

a sort of favouritism shown towards Christian churches in Canada is merely a historic reality. Among European immigrant groups coming to North America, Christianity in its various expressions dominated. In the current, religiously plural environment, those institutionalized expressions of religious faith are poised to make a comeback, precisely because their institutional expression lends them a measure of credibility.

One of the most compelling evidences of a renaissance of religion in Canada Bibby offers concerns an increase in weekly church attendance among teenagers. In the eight years between 1992 and 2000, the national attendance average increased 4% to reach levels that hadn’t been seen since the early 1980s. At the same time, however, research indicates that overall identification with religious groups in general among teenagers has declined nationwide. Bibby offers an additional consideration to take into account when comparing these numbers: “Fewer identify, but those who do show signs of being more involved and more committed. Here again, we see signs of vitality and life in almost all groups” (*Bibby, 2002, 88-9*).

Churches are consolidating and strengthening their social resources, a far cry from what had been predicted. If Bibby is right, churches stand poised to take a significant place in the public square. Ultimately, this means city governments and business communities need new language to come to grips with the impact of the institutional church.



# Looking at Hamilton

## 1. BUILDING INSTITUTIONS: THE NEW CASE FOR THE CHURCH

**M**uch has already been made of the institutional nature of the church and, more broadly, of religious communities. Before proceeding, the term “institution” needs to be carefully understood as a social environment in which people come together for some purpose. The structure of an institution transcends the particular characters of the individuals who operate within it. Institutions – government (at any level), schools, businesses, and churches – are more than just the sums of the individuals that make them up. A small group of people coming together for some purpose, even if they seem lost in a sea of millions, can accomplish far more together than individually. Because they transcend the individual, institutions take on a life of their own.

But simply coming together for a common purpose is not enough to distinguish institutions from less-developed forms of organization. What sets institutions apart is their strong connection to the past – a form of historical continuity, or rootedness.

### **THE CHURCH IS THE MOST SOPHISTICATED INSTITUTION IN EXISTENCE CAPABLE OF DELIVERING THE VISIONS LAID OUT BY CITY LEADERS FOR URBAN RENEWAL.**

“Organized religion” has come under a lot of fire in the past few centuries. What follows is not intended to be a perfect picture of communities of faith. During some of the interviews that were conducted, it was apparent that churches often failed to live up to the expectations people have for them. One of the interviewees stopped attending church because of some bad experiences with mismanagement by church leadership. Even pastors expressed frustration

over unfinished and seemingly impossible business. Without a doubt, churches have failed to live up to their potential, and they continue to fail. But what churches have achieved as institutions demands attention, including the attention of today’s urban planners.

Among the many different types of institutions that could be mentioned, the rest of this report will consider evidence that indicates the church is the most sophisticated institution in existence capable of delivering the visions laid out by city leaders for urban renewal.

The church as an institution is organized around the worship of God. Far from being “too heavenly minded to be any earthly good” – the old criticism brought against so-called “high-minded” religious groups – the church was and still is a very strong force for “earthly good.” Religious

# Parenting a COMMUNITY: A Tuned-In MOTHER CHURCH

worship is a two-sided coin: on one side the worship of God, and on the other side the many ways that God can be worshipped. Faith without deeds, they say, is dead. Such a belief is widely shared, especially among monotheistic faiths. Islam has among its five pillars of faith *zakat*, or alms-giving. Jewish communities are also known for their generosity. Structures for seeking the welfare of the wider community are built into institutional faith communities.

Compare churches with other forms of community. The Saturday, September 11, 2004 edition of the *Hamilton Spectator* featured a startling front-page headline: *"We're tired, apathetic, Godless and cynical. And we don't trust our neighbours. How did we end up here? Do you vote? Do you watch the news? Do you volunteer? Do you care?"* The article appeared as the first in a five-part series titled *"The Great Disconnect"*, which called residents of Hamilton to take seriously the lack of civic spirit in the community. Judith Maxwell, head of a leading Canadian think tank called the Canadian Policy Research Network, reflected in the same article how community might best be built:

"If I had to make a list of the attributes (that built a close knit-community), it would be communities that have true community schools. Not just a school that kids go to from 9 a.m. until 3 p.m. and then a custodian locks the door or gate to the playground at 4 p.m., but a school which is open from 7:30 a.m. so kids can be dropped off if necessary and there's supervision and maybe breakfast served.

"There are afternoon and after-school homework clubs and activities. Then community meetings take place in the evening. Maybe the library is situated next door or in the school. Festivals, school events and the equivalent of church socials – all of those things build community.

First Hamilton Christian Reformed Church got off to a shaky start in its role as a home church for newly-arrived Dutch immigrants in 1925. Economically and culturally, new members were unsure of themselves in a new country. Pastors had to be dispatched twice from a supporting Grand Rapids, Michigan congregation. But their passion for helping immigrants never wavered.

The church grew into a major hub for arriving immigrants. Following the Second World War, when Canada opened its doors to a huge wave of Dutch people escaping the impoverished conditions of their homeland, First Hamilton served both as a gateway to Western Canada, and simply as a place to rest.

As a result, First Hamilton CRC was directly responsible for planting at least eight other churches in southern Ontario. Tim Sheridan, Outreach Coordinator at the church, could only speculate as to how many other churches across the country have been helped indirectly by the First Hamilton "mother church."

But what was to be done when their mission as a welcoming enclave for Dutch immigrants had, by the late 1990s, been essentially completed? Facing dwindling attendance and a clouded future, some thought it might be time to close the doors and move the church out to the suburbs, where a majority of the congregation was living.

Instead, the leadership decided to stay and to redefine the church as an outward-looking congregation, a light to its surrounding Durand and Kirkendall neighbourhoods.

The result? Church membership rose, while average age declined significantly. Sheridan believes that intentionally refocusing the church's mission is a huge factor in growth. In addition to offering small community services like food baskets, meals, and ministry to people suffering from severe mental disabilities, First Hamilton CRC is currently building on a recent Community Opportunity Scan (COS), keeping its ears open to the church's opportunities for service among Hamilton's residents and businesses.

Maxwell suggests that schools build a sense of community critically important to human life, and in doing so fulfill the role that once belonged to the church.

There is no denying that schools have a vital role to play in society. But school communities represent a very distinct portion of the larger population: families with young children living at home. Relatively few people – only those that earn their right to stay as teachers or administrators – remain in the education system their whole lives. Thus, schools fall far short of the goal of the institutional church: integrating a wide variety of people for long periods of time.

Churches are not without their own social boundaries, most obviously the boundaries of religious belief. But while it might seem commonplace to say that atheists have no place in churches, the boundaries are not as strict as one might expect. There are expectations for membership, certainly. But church membership, however this might be defined from one denomination to another, is not a necessary requirement for attending and being part of the church community. Surprisingly, neither is conformity of belief, though various processes exist to bring new believers in step with the larger body.

It is, perhaps, better to define a school community as a community of limited scope. Students attend school to become educated. While they attend, they are primarily called to be a student. And when they finish being a student, the usual course of action is to move on. By comparison, there is a

**“DEPARTMENTS EXIST IN CITY GOVERNMENT TO REPRESENT EVERY OTHER GROUP IN THE CITY – FROM THE DISABLED, TO GAYS AND LESBIANS, TO THE TRANSGENDERED. BUT THERE IS NO DEPARTMENT DEVOTED TO CHURCH RELATIONS.”**

process of becoming a member of a church community, but the process is superseded by the purpose of coming together in community to worship God. A member may cut ties with a specific church, yet remain in the broader church community which transcends denominational boundaries.

Churches draw people of all ages together, bettering Maxwell's community schools at the game of inclusivity. A case might be made, however, that schools better represent the population in terms of ethnic diversity than individual churches or parishes do. There can be no denying that there is some truth here. Historically, church communities have maintained a strong ethnic identity. Two of the churches that will be looked at though have disassociated themselves with a specific ethnicity. A third is actively looking to do the same, although it will be a number of years before this will be achieved. Believing that the message of the Gospel is for all humankind, these church communities are open to members from any age demographic or social or ethnic background.

Considering the point of ethnic inclusion from another angle, individual churches have identified themselves with specific ethnically-defined communities, so that they become hubs of those specific cultures. Taking a broad overview of churches in Hamilton, it is very evident that churches

# In It for the LONG RUN

Homestead Christian Care is a stopping-place for sufferers of mental disabilities, offering a place for patients discharged from psychiatric hospitals into the community. Only a few years ago, it was a seven-bed operation, struggling to meet a large need. Facing an uphill financial battle, they considered their options carefully.

“If it’s worth doing, it’s worth doing for the long term – or until the problem is fixed.” Such was the opinion of Jeff Neven, a director at Homestead. This wasn’t merely a mission statement for a wall plaque, either. Today, Homestead runs five different facilities with a total of 120 beds in Hamilton, and is expanding into Woodstock.

Even so, it’s not enough. Neven notes that Ontario currently has only one fifth of the beds needed to house people with mental disabilities.

Their spectacular growth in just five years took entrepreneurial spirit and a rare willingness to invest time and energy. Graham Cubitt, another Homestead director, notes that employees are selected for their specific vision, their willingness to serve the community, and their financial sacrifices for a non-profit dream.

are at home in many different cultural groups: Ukrainian, Greek, British, Slovak, Dutch, Chinese, to name a few.

## 2. MAKING THE ARGUMENT

The following research is based on interviews conducted with pastors, church leaders, social service workers, and persons involved directly or indirectly with city government in Hamilton, Ontario.

Without exception there was general agreement that the church ought to play a significant role in the generation and maintenance of community life. Each person interviewed – not just pastors and church leaders, who can be expected to favour more church involvement – had his or her own language to express this point, but the meaning was common across the board.

Cathy Gazzola, President of the Durand Neighbourhood Association, believes that churches should be at the heart of economic renewal. In her words, “That is the way it should be done.” Gazzola was raised Catholic, and while she no longer attends church, she still credits her parent’s strong Catholic faith, including its social justice and political concerns, for her own desire to get as deeply involved as she is in civil affairs. A similar message can be heard from Mark Fraser, a Senior Social Planner working for the Social Planning and Research Council. Fraser acknowledged, “Faith-based communities do better at community organization than most every other group.”

At present the City of Hamilton has a strong record of finding ways to partner with faith communities

and other religious groups on individual initiatives This will be explored further when the second of the five themes listed below is examined. City government, however, does not appear to be fully aware of the potential resource base represented by established religious communities or institutions. One person commented, “Departments exist in city government to represent every other group in the city – from the disabled, to gays and lesbians, to the transgendered. But there is no department devoted to church relations.” If theories of secularization and the inevitable disappearance of religion for public life were correct, a blind spot towards organized religion wouldn’t pose a huge problem. As Berger and Bibby insist about the place of the church and other faith-based institutions, they don’t appear on the verge of vanishing any time soon.

Five themes emerged from the interviews which will be traced to illustrate the vital role played by institutional religious communities in the urban centres – in Florida’s terms, the church as a creative class. Within them, New Urbanist concerns for redesigned neighbourhoods and small-scale, “walkable” communities are addressed. And, perhaps more importantly, the substantial role played by religious communities in addressing issues of social justice will also be explored, to trace largely unseen connections between the church and economic renewal.

The five themes or vital roles of the institutional urban church:

- creation of communities that transcend social boundaries;
- involvement in the wider community, especially in terms of social service programs offered;
- drawing people to live in the city;
- significant financial investments; and
- valuable contribution of church buildings to the city landscape

## A. TRANSCENDING SOCIAL BOUNDARIES

On a Sunday morning at First Hamilton Christian Reformed Church, located at the corner of Charlton and Hess just off Queen Street, one is able to sit in the pew and see several retired millionaires, families with young children or teenagers, young professionals, middle-aged business people and established blue-collar workers. The pews are full on a Sunday morning, but not only with what many would perceive to be the “successful” sorts of people mentioned above. Several suffering from mental disabilities also call First Hamilton home. They have all come together to form community in the context of a local congregation, an example of the institutional expression of religious communities. Here they meet each other, talk together, share life.

Among the basic tenets of their movement, New Urbanists argue the need to design neighbourhoods which intentionally transcend social barriers. Their solution includes housing that meets the various needs of a diverse population – married or single, with children or without, wealthy or not-so – and includes attractive public spaces and, most importantly, a network of well-designed sidewalks. Building a beautiful neighbourhood in which to live is no doubt important, for it is unlikely that ill-kept yards and streets will do much to draw people outside their homes. But a soft spot in this model can be legitimately probed. Are mere sidewalks enough to build the sort of community New Urbanists envision?

### **ARE MERE SIDEWALKS ENOUGH TO BUILD THE SORT OF COMMUNITY NEW URBANISTS ENVISION?**

The absence of the local church from the New Urbanist plan becomes very apparent when, for example, the diverse attendance at First Hamilton is taken into account. The church demonstrates a remarkable ability to transcend social barriers.<sup>2</sup>

A similar story can be told of Philpott Memorial Church, located on York Boulevard across from Copps Coliseum in downtown Hamilton. Pastor Lane Fusilier says Philpott will be filled with anywhere between 400 to 600 people at the 9:30 a.m. Sunday morning service. The average age of this crowd is approximately 25 years old and is made up of young families, young professionals, a significant contingent of McMaster University students, as well as twenty medical doctors and eight medical students. Immediately following the first service, a second is held at 11:15, where a very

<sup>2</sup> Churches fall under considerable criticism for having congregations that drive in from the suburbs in the morning and don’t actually live in the immediate vicinity of the church buildings. In this view community is created, but is created quite separately from places of residence. This criticism will be addressed in the discussion of the third theme.

different section of Hamilton's population is represented. The 300 people listed on the membership roll have an average age between 65 and 70; approximately half attend each week. Like First Hamilton, Philpott shows all the signs of a socially and culturally diverse community.

As should be expected, neither of the two churches mentioned here are perfect models of integrated communities. The congregation of First Hamilton remains strongly defined by its Dutch heritage. Tim Sheridan, the church's Outreach Coordinator, acknowledges as much, but says that the congregation is in the process of redefining itself, not in terms of ethnicity, but in the context of its surrounding neighbourhood. Philpott has its struggles as well. A quick look at who attends the different services is enough to demonstrate this. Average age is not the only difference: where the early service is attended mainly by white-collar professionals, the later service is attended by retired blue-collar workers, many of whom worked in Hamilton's steel industry. Pastor Fusilier says Philpott operates almost as if it were two separate congregations, separated by age or even cultural boundaries.

Notwithstanding the historical circumstances that made First Hamilton and Philpott Memorial Church what they are today, both are open to becoming more diverse than they are presently. They both emphasize that the Gospel message is meant for all people. The church doors are open to any who would walk through them seeking answers that, Bibby says, only the gods can provide. Again, one may legitimately wonder whether sidewalks, or even festivals at community schools, are enough. City government may have no business probing into the hearts and minds of residents, but there should at least be recognition of the potent force institutional religious communities possess to transcend social boundaries.

## B. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND SERVICE

On Wednesday mornings, members of Hughson Street Baptist Church run a Breakfast Club in the basement of St. Luke's Parish Hall. The two are especially well situated to offer the service, being at opposite corners of a school yard bounded by the buildings of Bennetto Elementary School and St. Lawrence Separate School (Elementary). Dwayne Cline, pastor of Hughson Street, says as many as 80 children have been fed breakfast in recent years. And while the other four days of the school week are led by other organizations, the church still provides volunteers. The church has established such a helpful track record with Bennetto that when volunteers are needed to staff school outings, Hughson Street usually gets a call. Presently, staff at Hughson Street Baptist are all required to spend ten to fifteen hours each week in volunteer community service.

Across the schoolyard, St. Luke's Anglican Church, on John Street North, opens the doors of its parish hall for the Breakfast Club, but it does not provide staff. Instead, the small, 70-member congregation directs its energies towards maintaining the Seafarers Mission. The Right Reverend Sir Robert Hudson, its current rector, goes to meet each and every foreign ship to arrive in Hamilton's ports. Last year, around 130 foreign ships entered Burlington Bay in the 10 ½ months of accessibility; in each case, the rector was the first Canadian to board after Canada Customs finished their inspection. The Mission puts itself at the disposal of the foreign sailors, driving them around to stores to purchase necessities or amenities.

The contributions made by Hughson Street Baptist and St. Luke's, though undoubtedly invaluable, are relatively small when put in a city-wide perspective. Volunteer-run social services organizations fill an essential role to meet the much larger needs of the community few individual congregations could even hope to address. But the influence of the institutional church extends far beyond the capabilities of individual congregations.

Paul B. Reed and L. Kevin Selbee of Statistics Canada find that a strong connection between religious faith and community service presently exists. In their "The Civic Core in Canada: Disproportionality in Charitable Giving, Volunteering, and Civic Participation (2001)," Reed and Selbee describe the dominant characteristics of Canada's civic core as having "a strong religious orientation, multiple forms of personal generosity and supporting a common good, and explicit commitment to community" (Reed and Selbee, 2001, 15). They identify a "moral elite" in Canadian society, featuring a strong propensity towards religious observance. What religious communities possess in terms of social, material, and financial resources will go a long way to address the many issues facing urban centres.

Consider a startling statistic from "Income and Poverty in Hamilton (2004)," published and produced by the Social Planning and Research Council (SPRC):

There are enough people living in poverty in Hamilton to fill Copps Coliseum five times... almost 20% or 95,370 of Hamilton residents are living on incomes below the poverty line. This includes almost 25% of all children under the age of twelve (Fraser, 2004).

## **BEYOND THE RECOGNIZABLE FOOD-BANK SYSTEM THERE IS AN IMMEASURABLE PERIPHERY, MADE UP PREDOMINANTLY BY CHURCHES AND OTHER RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATIONS THAT RUN MUCH SMALLER SCALE PROGRAMS...**

The author warns against jumping to quick conclusions about the causes of poverty, but suggests a number of trends working against those in low and middle income groups: decreasing incomes, rising cost of living, and an expansion of the number of "low wage part-time, temporary or contract position, with few or no benefits."

These are much bigger problems than a single religious community could ever hope to address. What happens when money and food runs out? Currently Hamilton has a well-developed social safety net in place, especially in the form of food banks. The Hamilton Food Share network connects food banks together in order to better serve the community. Many of these have their roots in church groups, like the Salvation Army, which runs a food bank at Bay and York (right next door to Philpott Memorial Church) and serves as many as 6000 people at Christmas. Major Byron Jacobs, a regional director for the Salvation Army, notes that many people do not realize that the Salvation Army is first a church, and only second a distributor of social services. For his part, Fraser observes that beyond the recognizable food-bank system there is an immeasurable periphery made up predominantly by churches and other religious organizations that run much smaller scale programs like soup kitchens and food basket distribution. Hughson Street Baptist is among them.

The SPRC's "Progress Report on Homelessness (2003)" identifies homelessness as "a growing crisis in Hamilton. Every night, hundreds of people stay in emergency shelters. Every night, families with children are placed in motel rooms because they have nowhere else to go" (Wingard, 2003, 9). Numbers have increased steadily over the past few years. A quick glance at the list of Hamilton's emergency shelters shows how many operate in connection with church communities. To list a few, the Salvation Army's Booth Centre, the Roman Catholic Good Shepherd Men's Centre and Martha House for women, the Evangelical Mission Services Men's Centre and the Wesley/ Living Rock Temporary Youth Shelter are among the twelve organizations listed. The staffs at all of these are

mainly provided by their sponsoring faith communities. As Fraser pointed out, “Social capital has to be mobilized; the spiritual capital of faith communities has a huge ability to mobilize people.”

Jeff Neven, a member of First Hamilton, is living evidence for Fraser’s argument. He is the director of Homestead Christian Care which maintains 120 beds in five separate facilities across Hamilton for people suffering from mental disabilities. Neven claims, “Homestead selects its employees specifically for their vision” – a key component, he says, because they “don’t pay enough to keep anyone around who doesn’t share the vision.” In the past five years, the organization has seen incredible growth. From 2000, when there were only seven beds in a single residence, to 2005, the budget has grown from \$120,000 to \$1.6 million. Plans are also in the works to expand into Woodstock, Ontario, at a facility that will provide thirty beds by the fall of 2005.

Funding for shelter programs comes from a variety of different sources. Homestead receives about a third of the money it needs to operate from the government, while the other two thirds come from either private donations or rent paid by tenants. The story of government support is shared by every social service organization listed here. Neven notes that the government provides a considerable amount of funding but runs very few social service programs. “The government,” he says, “is not very good at social service programs because of its size – a personal relational component is missing, or if it exists at all it is usually adversarial.” Fraser came to a similar conclusion through a study of City of Hamilton programs providing jobs for people in need of work. A person could be provided with a job on Tuesday, but there was a high probability that person would lose the job by Friday because the City lacked the necessary personal sensitivity necessary to address a job applicant’s individual circumstances.

**“THE GOVERNMENT... IS NOT VERY GOOD AT SOCIAL SERVICE PROGRAMS BECAUSE OF ITS SIZE – A PERSONAL RELATIONAL COMPONENT IS MISSING, OR IF IT EXISTS AT ALL IT IS USUALLY ADVERSARIAL.”**

Of the many organizations that find their roots in faith communities, the Salvation Army is perhaps the best suited to offer social service to the community, a product of its unique history surrounding their founders, William and Catherine Booth, and their mission to the slums of 19<sup>th</sup> century London, England. Major Jacobs notes that the Salvation Army is the number-one provider of transitional and emergency shelter in Canada. In the Hamilton area these include the previously mentioned Booth Centre, Gray’s Haven (a home for teen mothers), and Lawson Lodge (a care centre for the physically and mentally disabled). Salvation

Army Thrift Stores also are well known across Canada for selling donated clothing. Any profit realized is funneled back into other service programs. Major Jacobs added that in Hamilton the Salvation Army staffs and operates a suicide prevention and crisis centre twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. The Salvation Army also sends out a soup van 365 days a year that serves as many as 300 people in a single day. The list goes on.

Not every church in Hamilton contributes to the same degree; but most are on the scene. Graham Cubitt, like Neven a member of First Hamilton and a director at Homestead Christian Care, took part in the church’s Community Opportunity Scan (COS). The church is in the process of looking for more ways its members can serve its two surrounding neighbourhoods, Kirkendall and Durand. Cubitt has joined with Cathy Gazzola on the Durand Neighbourhood Association to help “plug the church into the community.” The COS has identified a number of service opportunities, including helping out in a women’s shelter within walking distance of the church itself.

Pastor Lane Fusilier has a vision for Philpott Memorial: to “become a church that networks with social service agencies, and staffs them with volunteers.” Like First Hamilton, Philpott has a lot of work to do before Fusilier’s vision becomes a reality. But Philpott’s membership is ready and willing to respond to opportunities. As recently as May 2005, 160 people showed up to help out in a neighbourhood clean-up project.

Although there are many success stories, some churches are struggling to remain open. Of the twelve Anglican parishes that exist currently in Hamilton, rumours circulate that as many as five will be closed in the near future. Susan Huxford Westhall, a longtime member of the All Saints Parish on Queen Street, doesn’t think her church will be among the ones to close, but she is quick to identify the problem the denomination currently faces: very few people between the ages of 20 and 45 attend. An entire generation has been lost. But even in small numbers, attendees are very active in the church, she says. There are a few families who bring their young children – the next generation which, she hopes, will replace the one that was lost. Over at St. Luke’s, Boris Nusko and his family fit Westhall’s description of a highly involved, young family on which the future of so many parishes rests. Westhall describes the membership at All Saints as “nibbling up” – rising slowly.

In the last forty years, the Anglican Church in the Hamilton region has lost two thirds of its membership. This decline has meant that many of the community services they once offered have been closed down. Westhall remembers how at one time there were five Friendship Centres running in Hamilton for the developmentally disabled. At least two have closed down because no younger volunteers have filled in an aging and thinning base of volunteers. However, younger membership must take up the task of volunteering if, for example, St. Matthew’s House on Barton Street is to continue to offer counselling, ESL programs, rehabilitation apartments, and a food bank.

Some words must be said about the ability of many churches to integrate immigrants into the Hamilton community. Strong ties to nationality pose a problem for members of Eastern Orthodox churches in North America. Once immigrants get settled, the strong ties to ethnicity begin to break down and many cease going to church. Orthodox churches find it a hard battle to adapt themselves to a new cultural environment. But even while they struggle to find their place, they perform a very valuable service to the large immigrant community as a safe haven and a network of opportunities for immigrants coming into Hamilton. As members, people are able to find employment and places to live. Fr. Bodan Hladio, from Ukrainian Orthodox Cathedral of St. Vladimir on Barton Street in Hamilton’s east end, recounted how in the past his church had served such a purpose for Ukrainian immigrants. Now that much of the liturgy is read in English, Orthodox from many different backgrounds regularly attend. The church may be primarily organized around worship, but the social networks that develop there are also important. Fr. Hladio recalls a Ukrainian Catholic employer stopping by his church, simply looking for workers. Ethnicity and a common Christian identity no doubt had a large role to play in this process.

In the recent past, First Hamilton served for many years in a similar capacity, as a conduit for Dutch immigrants to Canada. Today, the church offers ESL courses for Chinese immigrants, in conjunction with Hamilton’s Settlement and Immigration Services Organization (*SISO*).

Healthy communities cannot be built if the problems of poverty and physical and mental disabilities are not addressed. Proponents of New Urbanism have recognized this, and proposed neighbourhoods where rich and poor share the same space. But much more than a shared space is needed. The overwhelming contribution made by religious communities to social services in Hamilton is evidence

# If you **BUILD** it...

For a church built inside a towering business and shopping district, a real faith community can be hard to find. Philpott Memorial Church found a solution: build the community up around them.

Originally founded in 1892, the church once had a large presence in the city's centre. Between 2000 to 3000 people would show up on a Sunday evening to hear the evangelist Peter.W. Philpott preach.

A lot of that changed when Copps Coliseum was built. Park Street, which formerly went straight into King Street and connected Philpott to the city's downtown core, was diverted. Says Pastor Lane Fusilier, suddenly "nobody could see the church."

To counteract the ill effect the construction of Copps' had on the church, Philpott purchased a number of properties in its immediate vicinity. Much of that land is currently used for parking space, and is leased out during the week for public use. But Philpott has started a long term vision for the church which includes a massive redevelopment of church property, with the end goal of rebuilding a livable community right around the church.

When Pastor Fusilier came to Philpott six years ago, attendance was stable at around 150 people each week, while the average age of the congregation was somewhere between 65 and 70 years old. Today, Philpott runs two separate services on Sunday, one for the older generation and one for the younger. The younger people's service is regularly attended by over 400 people: an indication of a bright urban future for the burgeoning congregation.

that a common vision is required to make the gears of the social services industry turn. Through all this a single conclusion can be drawn: institutional faith is an impetus to serving community and is capable of marshalling significant resources in terms of people, money, programming, and physical facilities.

## C. DRAWING MEMBERSHIP TO LIVE DOWNTOWN

No more than a decade ago, many downtown churches were considering closing their doors and either relocating to greener pastures in the suburbs or disbanding altogether. This was the story of Philpott Memorial Church, First Hamilton, and Hughson Street Baptist, and is currently being retold in the parishes of the Anglican Church in Hamilton. For the first three churches mentioned, at least, the story has changed. While a large portion of First Hamilton's congregation still commutes to church, over the last number of years the number of people who walk to church has been very steadily increasing. One Sunday morning in June 2005, for example, three new members were introduced to the congregation. Each of them lived within walking distance of the church.

Walkability is important to New Urbanists. The automobile, they say, is stealing time and community from North Americans, and is having a very profound effect on the quality of human life. Most people will acknowledge the significant benefits the automobile has introduced, especially the ability to travel great distances. But anyone trying to find a balance between the two perspectives should be able to recognize the social benefits, not to mention the environmental benefits, of being able to walk to work, to the store, or to church.

When Dwayne Cline came to Hughson Street Baptist Church eight years ago, the entire congregation drove to downtown Hamilton from the suburbs on a Sunday morning and left sometime early Sunday afternoon. This arrangement didn't encourage investment in the neighbourhood of the church building. Like many other churches, Hughson seriously considered relocating. Cline, however, had a vision of a church that not only inhabited,

but served the Hughson Street neighbourhood. In the eight years he has served Hughson as the senior pastor, the congregation has been transformed. Between 70 and 75 percent of Hughson's membership growth has been attracted through community service projects. Almost as large a percentage walks to church on Sunday morning. With so many members and regular attendees within close proximity to the church, Hughson has direct access to a large volunteer base to staff events like the Breakfast Club. The church has published a flyer listing at least 28 different ways members of the church can serve the community.

Not every church downtown Hamilton is located near enough to residential areas to make walking in on Sunday mornings practicable. Philpott Memorial Church finds itself surrounded by a sea of commercial buildings and parking lots at its current location. Pastor Fusilier speaks of meeting the needs of people where they can be found, with the resources available. The same must be said about meeting the needs of the church. Some past members of the church possessed the foresight to see parking space becoming a serious problem, so at present three nearby parking lots are owned, leased out for public use on weekdays.

Not every example provided here demonstrates a strong revitalization of interest in living an urban life, but they provide mounting evidence that the times are changing. No longer are church members moving en masse to the suburbs. Rather, the general trend of suburban flight shows signs of reversing itself within church communities. How much of this belongs to a much larger New Urbanist trend of reinvesting in urban centres can certainly be debated. However, the concentration of a wide variety of resources in faith communities gives them a significant advantage over secular initiatives to see the New Urbanist project through to fruition.

#### D. PRIVATE INVESTMENT

Tim Sheridan is a recent addition to the staff at First Hamilton. His title is Outreach Coordinator, and he has been a significant force behind putting the "Community Opportunity Scan" into operation. Since his arrival from San Diego, California, in the summer of 2004, Sheridan has stewarded a \$500,000 private donation by getting to know the community, its leaders, and developing a plan for turning First Hamilton into a church that is active in community life, serving where opportunities present themselves. Pastor Fusilier from Philpott says that his church is currently looking to hire a graduate student from McMaster's Department of Sociology to fill a similar position.

Sheridan has made himself not only a resource to the church, but to the community-at-large, building social networks both he and others will be able to put to good use. The substantial private investment that made it possible to bring him to Hamilton is not unique to the First Hamilton community. Churches and other religious organizations draw many private dollars in the form of tax-deductible donations. Generally speaking, the financial means of congregations' members determine how much money can be generated for such services. But the possibility of donations from external sources should not be ignored. For example, Homestead Christian Care, staffed largely by people connected to the community around First Hamilton, is a free-standing institution separate from the church. Thus, it is an appropriate avenue of donation to people who might balk at donating directly to churches.

Due to their powerful ability to mobilize all types of resources, institutional religious communities play an extremely important role in the larger Hamilton community. A key to maintaining and even

# EASTERN beauty at a WESTERN intersection

furthering their success is private investment in the religious communities themselves. A private donation given primarily for the benefit of a church community, as in the case of Sheridan, has a beneficial ripple effect to the larger community. St. Luke's service to foreign sailors is another illustration. If St. Luke's were to close its doors and discontinue worship services, Rector Sir Robert Hudson would mostly likely leave, and the Seafarer's mission would lack a base from which to draw volunteer staff. But Boris Nusko, a long-time member of St. Luke's, says there are members of the congregation who can be called on to write a cheque when the church is in need.

The resources necessary to fund the life of religious communities come entirely from private donations. Some may not see this as investment in the community outside church walls, but in very tangible and real ways it is just that. Church communities must be sustained themselves in order to continue their outreach services.

In the discussion of the third theme, the ability of churches to draw people to live near downtown church buildings was explored. First Hamilton provided an excellent example of a church able to draw people back into Hamilton's downtown to make a life for themselves. Taking this into account, a church's direct investment in the wider community can be accompanied by a number of other incidental investments made by members who decide to purchase a home, shop at the corner store, join a neighbourhood association, or make friends with neighbours. In sum, these people who are drawn downtown help to build community through activities not formally related to the church.

Bibby points out that even during the years when church attendance was down significantly, in almost every Christian denomination a small core of believers remained committed to and invested in the life of the church. This committed membership has also continued

An impressive structure breaks the monotony of the urban landscape near the corner of Barton and Gage Streets. The Ukrainian Orthodox Cathedral of St. Vladimir rises from the horizon, by far the highest building in the area. Surrounded by predictable buildings with conventional commercial and residential designs, the cathedral's imposing height is augmented by its departure from the architectural norm. St. Vladimir's is different.

The interior is even more beautiful. Scenes from the Bible, stories of Ukrainian saints, and iconic representations are immortalized on the walls and vaulted ceilings.

Fr. Bohdan Hladio recounts how one day a young boy came off the streets to take a look inside the impressive church building. Leaving his friends on the sidewalk, the boy stepped across the threshold, and his eyes widened in amazement. After a few moments of silence, his eyes drawn upward, he turned back to his friends and beckoned them to come in and see how "cool" the space looked.

The Orthodox Church has long been good at preserving its beautiful tradition, including the architectural and artist elements of the cathedral. But in the North American context, it now finds itself struggling to adapt to an environment where different national traditions, like Ukrainian, don't mean as much as they did in Europe.

Fr. Hladio notes that holding so strongly to tradition is a mixed blessing for the Orthodox community. Many people coming from Eastern Europe out of Orthodox backgrounds first contact the

church upon arriving in Canada. It serves as a sort of home away from home and a place to find work. The Serbian Orthodox Church, Fr. Hladio mentioned, helped to introduce 100 refugees to Hamilton during the Bosnian conflict in the 1990s. However, North American culture tends to break down strong ties among ethnically or nationally-defined communities. And so, Fr. Hladio laments, many only come to church until they are settled in, then they find other congregations.

He calls it a crisis in Orthodox identity, but is confident the church and the community will survive it. Believing that something more important is in play, Fr. Hladio says, "Beauty will save the world."

to put their energies into serving communities around Canada. If, as Bibby would claim, a renaissance of religious observance is currently underway, how much more will the religious communities be in a position to contribute in coming years?

A fifth and final theme will consider the value of the physical presence of churches to the broader urban community. It should be noted here that a significant portion of the private investments discussed above go into the maintenance of church buildings.

### E. SACRED SPACES

A number of examples of how church buildings function as public spaces have already been offered. The Breakfast Club, for example, held at St Luke's Parish Hall every weekday morning,

demonstrates that churches are prepared to open their doors to the broader community.

Church buildings are not typically thought of as free public spaces. Compare, however, a church building to a restaurant. Almost without exception, restaurants will expect that their patrons purchase something if they plan on staying for any amount of time. A restaurant may be a public space, but sharing its space comes with a price attached. It goes without saying that the more expensive the items listed on the menu are, the more exclusive the restaurant becomes to the general population. Established religious communities on the other hand do not have as strict a policy towards public use of their buildings. While it is standard procedure to charge rent to a group that wants to use facilities for purposes not directly attached to official church functions (often as a cost-recovery measure), there are some notable exceptions to the rule. Hughson Street Baptist is currently open to anyone who lives in the immediate neighbourhood free of charge so long as there are no previous bookings. Guests are simply asked to abide by a number of rules, including one against the consumption of alcohol on church premises.

Every year anywhere from 3500 to 4000 people immigrate to Hamilton. Religious communities integrate newcomers into community through strong social networks and frequently allocate space in church buildings to ESL classes. Both First Hamilton and Philpott Memorial Church presently run programs in conjunction with SISO on their premises, and in the case of the former, supply volunteers to run the classes as well.

Public spaces are vital. But sidewalks and parks don't fit the needs of every public gathering. To start, walls and a roof are quite often needed for protection against the elements. Community centres and schools are able to fill this need, but these aren't as readily available, or as numerous, as churches. The Greater Hamilton area is home to over 276 religious church buildings, not counting numerous other buildings attached in some way to church properties.

New Urbanism emphasizes the importance of attractive physical space, well laid out sidewalks and parks, and creative architectural design. While it may over-estimate the ability of physical spaces

to encourage the development of intimate human communities, the importance of aesthetics should be not dismissed. Dave Witty, Dean of the Faculty of Architecture at the University of Manitoba, notes that beautiful city centres have a lot to do with keeping Florida's "creative class" from moving elsewhere – and that they demand a significant investment in architectural design and the careful and intentional use of space.

In Hamilton, quite a number of churches have been declared buildings of historical value. When First Hamilton applied to the City of Hamilton for permission to renovate the existing

**THE GREATER HAMILTON AREA IS HOME  
TO OVER 276 RELIGIOUS CHURCH BUILDINGS**

church building, consultants were brought in to ensure that the building's appearance was not damaged and the history it testified to was not lost. In this small way the wider community

has recognized the value-added by the physical presence of a church to the neighbourhood. In a limited sense, Witty's insights can be applied to churches regardless of where they are located in relation to the city's centre. Church buildings add character to the face of a neighbourhood; they break up the monotony of rows upon rows of houses; many preserve architectural styles and motifs of years gone by and, because of their great age, Jacobsen notes, their presence in a community has an anchoring and unifying effect.

Driving westbound on King Street in Hamilton towards Highway 403, the bell tower of the Cathedral of Christ the King can be seen rising between the rows of shops that line the roadside. The cathedral is placed perfectly so that for several minutes it occupies the centre of a driver's field of vision. Any number of buildings or signs could be placed in the same location, but none could add the same value to the cityscape. Highway 403, the most traveled road in the region, snakes through a depression in the middle of Hamilton and passes close by the cathedral, which lends character and beauty to the city.

The cathedral can also be seen from the office of the Work Research Foundation.

# Conclusion

Times are changing. Theories of secularization have been discredited in many academic circles as unable to account for the true complexity of human life. People are taking a renewed interest in the role played by religion, both in theoretical perspective and in personal commitment.

Who stands to gain in this changed environment? In the words of Bibby, “The surviving groups will be those that have been around a long time and continue to have a solid base of support...” (*Bibby, 2002, 233*). In other words, religious institutions, established communities of worship, stand to gain. Many of the different churches examined here show that this is exactly what they are doing: gaining. And the community of Hamilton is benefitting because of it.

Established religious communities – churches, synagogues, mosques, and the like – are institutions with a critical role to play in urban life. This is not a plea to recover what once was, but to recognize what presently is. Civil, business, and religious leaders need to change the language they employ to recognize and capitalize on the resource base represented by established religious communities for the economic development and renewal of cities.

## **THIS IS NOT A PLEA TO RECOVER WHAT ONCE WAS, BUT TO RECOGNIZE WHAT PRESENTLY IS.**

As this report has shown, times are also changing for churches themselves. Not so long ago, three of the five churches examined – First Hamilton, Hughson Street Baptist, and Philpott Memorial Church – were seriously considering closing the doors of their downtown locations due to declining membership. Yet in the space of a decade, all have worked to redefine their identities and become true city churches to great effect. All three churches report that membership is growing and that they are actively looking for ways to connect more closely with their neighbourhoods.

Each of the interviewees echoed in their own language the words of Cathy Gazzola: “That is the way it should be done.” Despite past failures to integrate with the wider community, there still remains an intuitive sense that there is a place and an important role for the church.

In Hamilton's VISION 2020, government and business, in addition to the citizenry of Hamilton itself, are listed as institutions critical to the long-term development of the city. Should not churches, or more broadly, established religious communities, be added to this list? At the very least, it is important to ask the question.

Should Hamilton's administrators take note? Further, should the city's business community be concerned? The intent of this report has been to investigate a possible connection between the health of churches and the socio-economic health of cities, and can only conclude with a word on the church's very great potential to contribute to a city's economy. No claim will be made whether in the church-city relationship the health of the former depends on the health of the latter, or *vice versa*. But it is important to take note of the fact that as Hamilton's downtown suffered economically, so did the membership of downtown churches. It is not too strong a claim to suggest that the two have an interdependent relationship.

Presently the City of Hamilton is looking for ways to revitalize its city centre. An important step in this process will include identifying potential places of growth. If churches can 1) grow community, 2) promote community service, 3) attract people to live downtown, 4) draw private investment, and 5) add beauty to the physical appearances of community – five themes emerging consistently from our study – they represent enormous potential for the very kind of growth the City of Hamilton is interested in promoting.

Another word about this report's more general application to urban centres. Wherever active and growing churches can be found, there can also be found seeds of urban renewal and economic growth. In order to capture this reality, language must be developed that adequately expresses what, according to the evidence, is truly happening on the ground. The church must be recognized as an institution critical to the development of healthy and vibrant urban centres.

# Appendix

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## METHODOLOGY

The research gathered comes from two sources:

### 1) SURVEY OF BROADER DEVELOPMENTS IN SCHOLARSHIP:

- a. New Urbanism
- b. Eric Jacobsen on New Urbanism
- c. Richard Florida's Creative Class
- d. Spiritual Capital
- e. Reginald Bibby on the renaissance of religion in Canada

### 2. INTERVIEWS OF CIVIL AND RELIGIOUS LEADERS IN HAMILTON.

- a. Rev. Dwayne Cline, Hughson Street Baptist Church<sup>3</sup>
- b. Graham Cubitt, Director of Homestead Christian Care<sup>4</sup>
- c. Mark Fraser, Senior Social Planner, Social Planning and Research Council<sup>5</sup>
- d. Rev. Lane Fusilier, Philpott Memorial Church<sup>6</sup>
- e. Cathy Gazzola, President of the Durand Neighbourhood Association<sup>7</sup>
- f. Vanessa Grupe, Senior Planner, Community and Design Section, City of Hamilton<sup>8</sup>
- g. Fr. Bodhan Hladio, Ukrainian Orthodox Cathedral of St. Vladimir<sup>9</sup>
- h. Major Byron Jacobs, Public Relations and Development Director, Salvation Army, Southwestern Ontario<sup>10</sup>
- i. Jeff Neven, Director of HSCC
- j. Boris Nusko, Member at the Parish of St. Luke's<sup>11</sup>
- k. Tim Sheridan, Outreach Coordinator at First Hamilton<sup>12</sup>
- l. Susan Huxford Westhall, Member at All Saints Church<sup>13</sup>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.hughsonstreetbaptist.com/>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.homesteadservices.on.ca/>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.sprc.hamilton.on.ca/>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.getchurch.org/>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.hwcn.org/Information/associations/durand/general.html>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.city.hamilton.on.ca/Planning-and-Development/development/Community-Planning-and-Design/default.asp>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.inform.city.hamilton.on.ca/details.asp?RSN=27516&Number=331>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.salvationarmy.ca/home/default.asp>

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.niagara.anglican.ca/parishes/index.cfm?PID=109>

<sup>12</sup> <http://firsthamilton.ca/>

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.niagara.anglican.ca/parishes/index.cfm?PID=102>

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## WHO'S GOING TO MAKE THINGS RIGHT IN OUR CITIES?

**P**ain is etched on our urban landscapes, for all to see. Poverty, illness and crime are only the most obvious battles in a difficult pattern of struggle. The division and isolation of our neighbourhoods and families rarely make the evening news.

City governments try and try again to bridge social gaps, but encumbered with too much bureaucracy and too little personal touch, their effectiveness is limited.

Yet one institution is working quietly to renew our urban centres, under the media radar, ignored by civic leaders. **THE CHURCH** is again being recognized by some as the most credible, reliable and sophisticated vehicle for our shared vision for better cities.

This White Paper doesn't reminisce about what once was, but illuminates what is: the church, working for urban renewal.

*The Work Research Foundation is a Hamilton, Ontario-based think tank, influencing people to a Christian view of work and public life. Visit them online at [www.wrf.ca](http://www.wrf.ca).*



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