

St. Paul's Anglican Community Centre

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Doug Cowley stands outside the former St. Paul's Anglican Church in Delta, a white stuccoed building with an elegant crown style steeple at the top of its tower. Begun in 1811 by Elder Able Stevens who founded the village, the church was finished by the Anglicans and then shared with the Baptists and Methodists. The three denominations shared the church until 1864 when the Anglicans purchased it outright. The building no longer holds services on Sundays, having been deconsecrated in 2013, but the spirit of this congregation continues on for this parish that played an important part in the history and development of the local village.



Doug Cowley inside St. Paul's church in Delta

"A little over ten years ago the village looked much different than it does today. It had an elementary school, a bank, two grocery stores, a restaurant, a hardware store, a liquor store, a gas station with a coffee shop, and a gift shop. Today most of those services have disappeared" says Doug. While efforts to revitalize the village core are underway, there is a significant gap in meeting community needs. There is no children's park or playground, no before and after school programs for young families, no drop-in centre for seniors or stay at home parents, no dedicated space for the food bank and no place for youth of the village to gather and relax with friends. "A not insignificant segment of the population has been unintentionally marginalized" he says.

In 2015, Doug was approached while working with a community group developing an economic plan for the village. Asked what was happening with the former Anglican Church, the group shared with him their vision for how St. Paul's could become a social hub for Delta, providing a location for social programs and a safe gathering place for different groups. From that moment on the idea was born along with the name: St. Paul's Anglican Community Centre (SPACC).

The local food bank in Delta needs a new home. Doug sees the SPACC as the spot to host that new home. Currently housed in the local United Church, the food bank lacks storage space and privacy—two things he feels that with the right upgrades, St. Paul's could provide for them. "First, we're going to create a space in there. But to do that, we need to put heating into the church, the existing heaters aren't functional" says Doug. They would also need to install shelving and add freezer storage along with an accessible entryway.

While forging the vision for how St. Paul's can serve multiple community needs, Doug found out quickly just how much red tape a project like this can run into. It has been a struggle to move things along through the various permits and approvals required at each step of the way.

St. Paul's, when active, was part of the Anglican Regional Ministries of North Leeds. A multi-point parish team ministry model that includes St. Paul's Newbliss, Christ Church Athens, Holy Trinity Oak Leaf, St. Luke's Lyndhurst and Holy Trinity Lombardy. Incumbent for the Parish, the Ven. Nancy MacLeod reflects on how the uniquely mission-based culture of this regional ministry has been key in fostering new imagination and creativity within their churches. "Some congregations just have deep in their identity, a missional imperative. There's a real desire to make sure that we're maintaining the connections and that it's not becoming this this group is doing this by themselves in this group is doing that—But how can we integrate these together so that the hole is stronger. And that's at the heart of what we're doing."

In addition to providing a home for the local food bank, the group's plan for the church (and church hall) is to also provide rehearsal and performance space for the Rideau Islands and Lakes Theatre School, a venue for concerts and recording sessions, meetings, weddings etc. "We have a concept of what we want to do in the community. But the details of that may change and we need to be able to pivot to meet those changing needs" says Doug.

COVID-19 effectively put a stop to progress on the project during 2020. Doug hopes that 2021 and hopefully an end to the pandemic will result in new energy and momentum going forward. "We have to rally each other every once in a while to make sure we keep going and get everybody on the same page. But we're not giving up. We firmly believe the village will benefit from this. The community is still supporting it. Anytime we do something [fundraising], it's amazing to me that people walk up and just hand you 20 bucks, 50 bucks; it's a wonderful thing."