

Landholdings Report

In thinking about how to best steward our land holdings, we acknowledge that for the most part we have come to hold the lands we do because of our participation in and benefit from the colonial project of dispossession.¹ We have responsibilities that we must face from our role in the injustices and harm that colonialism has caused and that we have benefited from.

At the same time, we understand the gift these lands and buildings have been in our lives and the lives of the wider community. They hold for us many stories of goodness, grace, fellowship and discipleship. Our buildings are not only places of worship but places that we and the wider community rely on for below market rentals and community events. We have inherited these places and hope for them to continue to be places and spaces of joy and hope in our world that desperately needs those.

Holding these seemingly divergent truths is a challenge and an honour as we navigate how to faithfully respond to the daily and seasonal opportunities that arise in our communities.

As people age they often face questions of what level of effort, care, and resources can they reasonably expect of themselves to maintain the same dwelling that has been home for many years. Many people reach an age and stage when they decide that it makes sense to downsize their living quarters. Keeping up the big family home is no longer as easy as it used to be. As our church communities age we face similar questions.

As I have spoken with many of you about the lands and buildings that we steward, one theme is that it is becoming more difficult to care for them in the ways we would like too. Our resources, human and financial, are thinner than we would like, and in some cases, we are nearing critical decisions about how to use our resources with competing priorities. We are responsible for these places and want to steward them for the good of our ministries, our communities and the environment.

We want to avoid the situation in parishes where all of the energy, time, and effort of the folks in a parish goes into the building, rather than being able to live out the ministry that God is calling us to in our communities. We know we need physical and sacred spaces to fulfill our task, and that we are called to the care and cure of souls more than roofs, lawns, and heating sources.

There are three main areas where this broader conversation manifests across our governance tables at the parish and diocesan levels:

¹ The particular stories of the land holdings we have started to gather with the work of Jesse Robertson over the last couple of years. Those reports will soon be available on the website.

- 1) Capital repairs and projects – This goes beyond the usual repairs and maintenance that we have in our budgets, and requires more time, attention, and funding to make happen. As an example over the past couple years we have had many parishes do work on roof repair or replacement and replacing heating sources (furnaces or heat pumps). With many needs and limited funds we need to make careful decisions about what we prioritize and when we do projects to ensure responsible husbandry of our sites.
- 2) Redevelopment possibilities – We have been developing a strategic awareness of where we have potential to undertake development projects that can reimagine certain sites for new streams of revenue, and renewed ministry possibilities. We have done initial feasibility reports on a number of sites, and have identified a few priority options if the right opportunity and funding arise. We have also learned that this work takes longer, costs more and that it will not be a deeply lucrative strategy even if some work out. There may be some revenue, but it will not be solely sustaining.
- 3) Strategic dispossession – We hold a number of sites across the diocese and letting some of them go may be necessary to right size our land holdings to match our ability to care and manage them. We recently sold a site of a community hall in Fanny Bay to the Comox Valley Regional District, and with those funds incoming Diocesan Council has discussed a new framework for use of funds from the sale of property which includes a land acknowledgment payment as reciprocity to the nations whose ancestral territory the site is within, and how best to allocate the remainder toward ministry and operational needs. There have also been consideration of offers for portions of the properties at St. Matthias (Sep 2023-Feb 2024) and St. Dunstan (June 2024). Looking at opportunities in tandem with the parish and their ministry context will continue to be part of the options we look at as we seek to faithfully steward what we hold. Strategic dispossession may also involve working with First Nations to repatriate certain sites where priorities align.

Each of these three categories needs to be undertaken with discernment and dedication. Between Asset Management Team, Finance Committee, Operations Committee and Diocesan Council, we spend a lot of our time and mental effort thinking about these things. We are striving to be transparent in the process of making decisions and have created a new section on the [website](#) to briefly state the latest on any properties that are being considered for significant decisions.

We have been contracting Wiser Projects to advise us and manage projects related to redevelopment, and provide technical expertise related to planning and municipal process. We have received a small grant from the Vancity Community Foundation to take the next step with our [framework for decision making](#) to help us continue to refine and extend our strategic thinking for our land holdings.

In order to use what we have to further our ministry, our overall goals include:

- Meeting Community Needs
- Diversifying revenue (with hopes of lowering apportionment when possible)
- Enhancing and preserving significant sites for ministry and community use
- Right-sizing our facilities to live into our renewed changing ministry context

Brief Project Updates:

St. John The Baptist, Duncan – The site has been approved for the development of 125 units of affordable housing which will be operated by Duncan Housing Society. The site will be subdivided and leased to DHS for the provision of affordable housing which is sorely needed in the community.

Building for the Future, Christ Church Cathedral, Victoria – The project to develop a “master plan” including getting the cathedral property rezoned for mixed use and residential uses is in its third year, and we are progressing through the long process. We have revised our application based on staff review and hope to have it passed along to the committee of the whole sometime this coming winter. For regular updates please visit the [BFTF website](#).

St. Peter, Lakehill, Saanich – After not receiving funds to achieve this project as an affordable housing project we will be exploring our options for how to progress and will update once a direction has been chosen.

There are a number of other parishes who are in exploratory conversations around what might be possible and how to best think about and use their sites. While development may be an option for some, we have limited capacity in the synod office to support multiple projects and limited resources to bring to projects. Asset Management Committee and Diocesan Council will be tasked with making decisions about how to best allocate our resources.

We’re not the only ones looking at this. Part of my role is networking across national and ecumenical conversations. I have been in multiple gatherings where there are experts and church leaders discussing how to approach and execute projects for the common good. In the spring I, along with the Bishop and Treasurer, attended an eight module course for non-profits to think through how to best diversify revenue. This led to some good ideas, and also some small things to iterate and improve our processes to incentivise good practice. We know that changing nothing is not an option that is available to us and are working hard to find new faithful options.

We are connected to people who have significant experience, and we are working diligently on your behalf to be wise and faithful stewards of the lands we have in our care. It will not be easy, and we are still in the phase of prototyping projects to see what might work best for us given our hopes and cares.

Continue to pray and follow along as work on this file unfolds.

Respectfully submitted,



Brendon Neilson
Executive Director

