

New Vision aspires to a mission of justice and renewal

Dixon Challoner and Rev. Ian Sloan

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Two churches came to an end. Another was born: New Vision United Church.

There really wasn't an amalgamation — the best-before date had expired on the two former churches, and they came to an end. In their place, a committed group of Hamiltonians gathered together to be a church in the urban core that was inclusive and diverse, celebrating the identities of those most exposed to social marginalization. The group breathed new life into old bones.

We think Hamilton is like this. We aspire to be a part of a Hamilton that is like this.

Three years ago, The Hamilton Spectator broke the news of the formation of the new congregation and the end of the two downtown United Church congregations, St. Giles and Centenary. In doing so, the newspaper commented that Centenary and St. Giles were two of dozens of congregations which, in "the next decade," might no longer be able to afford to occupy old and treasured buildings.

New Vision came into the properties of St. Giles and Centenary when the two former congregations ended. New Vision does not intend to sell either. It is actively seeking partners to work with it to do more than retain the buildings. We believe a church exists primarily, and most importantly, beyond the bricks and mortar. We believe a church must be an expression of community-wide shared hope and vision.

New Vision believes that Hamilton aspires to a vision of beloved community. "Beloved community" was a watchword of Martin Luther King Jr., a key phrase for him and an aspirational image for society's turning away from race-based discrimination toward the unity of all races. As Hamilton welcomes refugees, as we welcome newcomers from around the world; as the traditional peoples of the lands are acknowledged anew as treaty people by those of us who are settlers, such a beloved community of all the races can come into view. But beloved community entails more than the unity of the races. Beloved community ends the marginalization of persons of minority sexual orientation and gender identity. Beloved community ends the marginalization of those living in poverty.

For our part, New Vision seeks to be a way for people in Hamilton to become better neighbours and friends. We think beloved community originates in people seeing each other and being seen. We're not asking if God exists or not, we're not asking whether anyone believes God exists or not. We simply don't think those are very good questions.

The more pressing question for us is, "What's possible, and how can the people of Hamilton shape a renewal of Hamilton that brings that renewal into the long arc of justice?" New Vision is part of a movement that looks with love and justice at the entire community so that we can all say about any one part of our community, "that alone is not us, that alone is not 'beloved community.'" We aspire to something more than renovated homes and rising property values. We aspire to racial harmony, positive interfaith space, the recognition that individual and community assets are an enduring confluence of passion and creativity by which neighbours are truly appreciated and loved. The long arc of justice beckons us. Beloved community is before us.

Indeed, New Vision aspires to a Christianity that is only beginning to come into view: a Christianity of mutuality, of justice, of restoration and repair of neighbourhoods and of personal relations; a Christianity of the healing of individuals, whether they are known to us as friends or as enemies.

We want to join that sort of Christianity, and we think it is already here in our neighbourhoods.

Dixon Challoner and Rev. Ian Sloan are members of New Vision Church Council.