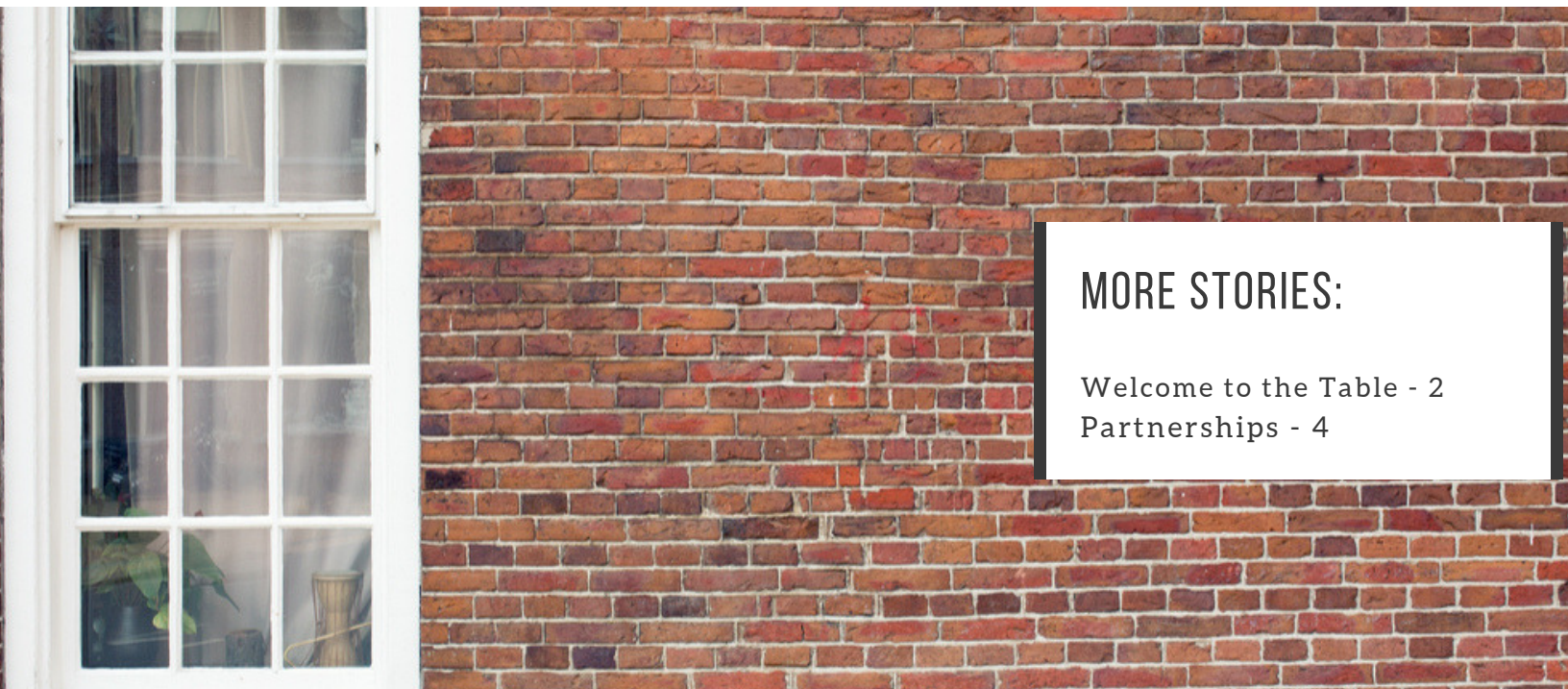


PARISH HOUSE

Newmarket Church of Christ



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THE VISION OF A PARISH HOUSE

Nathan Pickard

It all started over a decade ago when my truck rolled down the slight hill, through the neighbour's fence and into the large ditch at the front of the church property. After I picked my jaw up off the ground, I walked over to our neighbour's and introduced myself as the preacher whose truck rolled through the fence and into the ditch. This is how I met our neighbours living in the condominium directly beside the church property.

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WELCOME TO THE TABLE, STU

Stu came to us one Sunday morning out of the blue. He wore some grubby work clothes and a safety vest. His arms were covered in tattoos. In fact, if you looked closely, tattoos were covering most of his neckline.

Over the ensuing weeks Stu showed up at our monthly neighbourhood meal and periodically on Sunday mornings. Then Stu vanished. We never saw him again until the phone rang one afternoon and Stu was telling us he was in the hospital. We learned Stu was suffering from diabetes that wasn't able to be managed in ways that needed to be managed. Eventually Stu lost his toe. It could just be a matter of time till Stu loses a limb or two. Now we hear Stu's kidneys have failed and he needs dialysis.

One afternoon I stopped by the hospital to see Stu. I haven't seen Stu in a long time. We catch up over a cup of coffee. The conversation shifts from his health to hockey to work and a host of other conversations. Before I leave I ask Stu, "When you able to come to the Table?" Stu thinks I'm talking about the neighbourhood meal. And I am. But I'm also talking about a shared table where Christ is the host and the table where Christ is host there is always the gift of welcome, healing, and forgiveness. Stu's response was one of memories: "Those meals we share together are really good." I hope to shortly see Stu at the table so that whether we share a piece of bread and a cup of wine or whether we see Stu at the neighbourhood meal, Stu will encounter the risen Jesus who is still about the business of welcoming, healing and forgiving.

Welcome to the table Stu.

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*For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in.
Matthew 25:35*



In April 2008, after listening to our neighbours describe what it is like to live and work in the neighbourhood, we realized there were hungry children arriving at school. With permission, we started making lunches for kids in the neighbourhood. On February 10, 2019, we surpassed making 10,000 lunches for our neighbours.



The Vision of a Parish House, cont'd

From this first encounter we've been living into friendship with our neighbours. Our friendship has led us to develop a community garden with our condominium neighbours, which in turn has led us into friendships that have led us to share in weddings, funerals, BBQ's, and a few other neighbourhood initiatives, not to mention numerical growth and unexpected financial gifts from our condominium neighbours.

Encountering neighbours is sometimes scary, frightening and always has an element of risk. Understanding this, we took the risk and met our neighbours. What we discovered is our neighbours have gifts and are generous with their gifts. The neighbourhood was willing to share their gifts with us. With this new understanding, we walked across the street and met our neighbours at Maple Leaf Public School (MLPS) and the Longford subdivision. Again, what we discovered is that our neighbours have gifts and are generous in extending their gifts toward us.

Eventually what we found is a mutual sharing and receiving of one another's gifts. We received the gifts offered to us and the neighbourhood has received the gifts we offer. Our gifts have been 10,000 sandwiches for children in the neighbourhood who arrive at school hungry, the creation of a Summer Camp for kids in the neighbourhood, neighbourhood BBQ's, officiating at weddings and funerals, and the hosting of a monthly neighbourhood meal.

As I think about the last decade and all the stories we can tell about living with and for our neighbours in the name of Jesus, I'm continually amazed at the stories we can tell; stories that involve alcoholics finding salvation, single parents finding hope, grieving families finding comfort, hungry bodies finding food, the lonely discovering community. The stories emerging from living with and for our neighbours are stories that not only lead us deeper into the lives of our neighbours; they lead us to pay attention in greater detail to how God's kingdom is breaking into this world.

When Jesus taught his disciples to pray, part of the prayer he taught was for the disciples to pray, "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." When Jesus sent out the disciples to every town and village he himself was intending to visit, Jesus told the disciples to receive the gift of hospitality and to announce the nearness of God's kingdom (Luke 10:1-12). God's kingdom is breaking into this world. Meaning, God is setting the world right in all the ways the world has gone off kilter. God is making all things new. God has become king and his kingdom continues to be in-breaking.

What might this in-breaking kingdom look like? And is the in-breaking kingdom in some ways determined by the social and economic realities of specific neighbourhoods? Meaning, might the in-breaking kingdom take on specific characteristics in a neighbourhood that is predominately socially and economically impoverished compared to a neighbourhood that is predominately wealthy? I think so. I think the in-breaking kingdom is, in some way, determined by given realities of the neighbourhood, which is precisely why we as communities of faith need to be good ethnographers of our neighbourhoods. We need to be good at immersing ourselves into the life of our neighbourhoods so that we can learn something about and from our neighbours. As we learn from our neighbours, we can start to imagine what good news/gospel might look like in each neighbourhood. In our neighbourhood, we've learned that good news/gospel might look like food equality, kids attending a Summer Camp, the lonely finding community, and the ostracized being welcomed.

While practicing the nearness of God's kingdom, we've reached the point where additional personnel are needed to work alongside the Newmarket Church of Christ. We need help. With this, a vision of a Parish House has emerged. What might it look like to invite a family to live in the neighbourhood, on behalf of the community of faith and be witnesses of God's in-breaking kingdom? What might it look like to plant a missionary directly in the neighbourhood that we have grown in friendship with? And so the vision of a parish house was born.



As we seek to live into the vision of a Parish House, there are three areas we can partner together:

- Pray for us. Pray that we might have wisdom to engage such a vision
- Consider how your gifts might help us live into this vision: prayer partner, volunteer, trusted voice of guidance
- Consider on a congregational and an individual level to become a financial partner for a three year commitment

"To be most effective in bringing about change in a community or a neighborhood, it helps if you live there."

Larry James, *The Wealth of the poor*

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with the neighbourhood

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