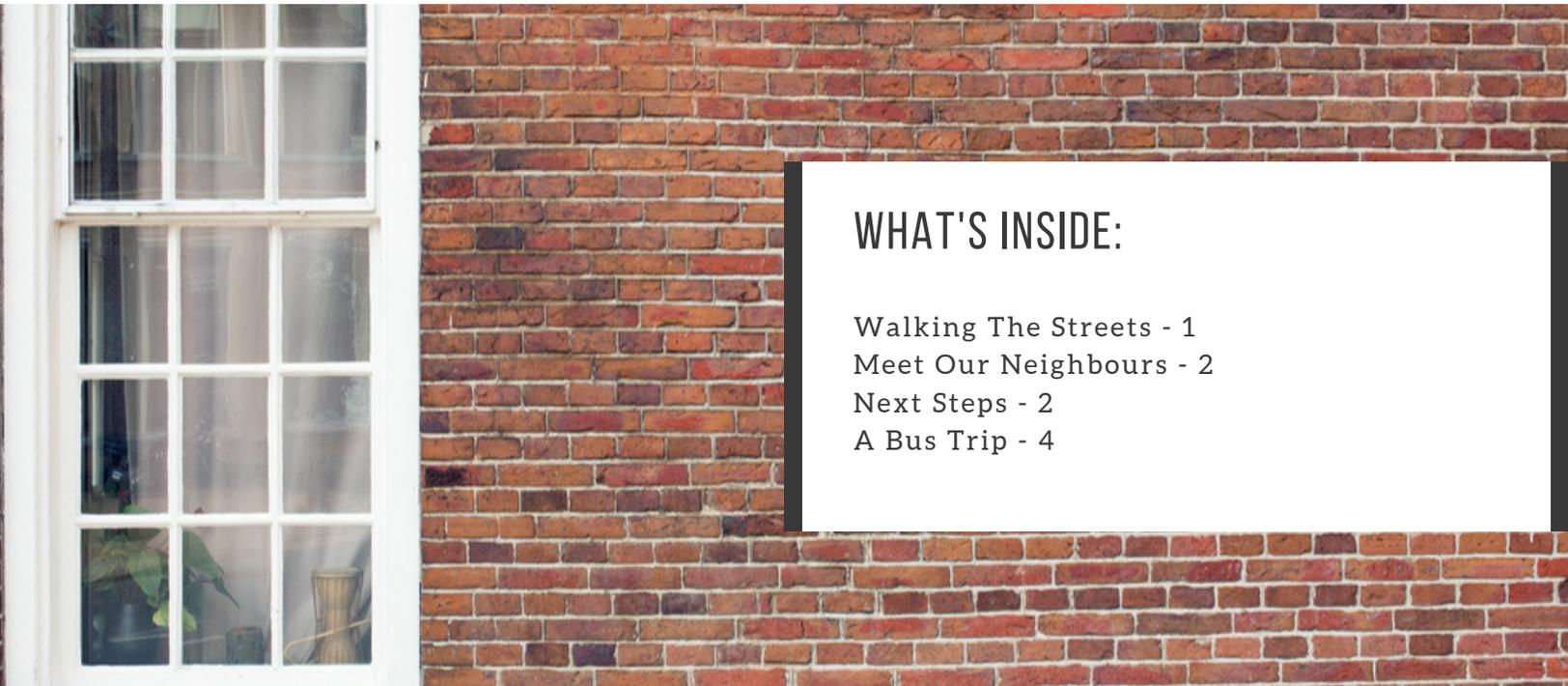


# PARISH HOUSE

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Newmarket Church of Christ

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## WALKING THE STREETS

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Nathan Pickard

Nearly two decades ago I had an experience that formed me to think about how to serve a Christian faith community. We had a new couple who started attending our worship services. They were recent immigrants. I learned they were living in a home that was about a 3 minute walk from the church building. One afternoon I left the building and decided to knock on their door.

As I neared the house, I saw through the big window overlooking the front yard, the woman in tears.

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# Meet Our Neighbours

Without a doubt, our neighbours have been instrumental in helping us as a Christian faith community live into the mission of God. Our neighbours have helped us understand the neighbourhood, worked alongside us in various ministries, and even at times hosted the church for various events. We are who we are because we live in relationship with our neighbours.

## *Meet Mieke*

Mieke knocked on the church office doors and introduced herself. As Mieke introduced herself, she told how she just moved into the neighbourhood and heard about the community garden and wondered how to participate. It wasn't long afterwards that Mieke showed up again at the office door, this time with homemade cinnamon buns. I knew right away I was going to be friends with Mieke.

Over time, Mieke volunteered making sandwiches, helped out with Summer Camp, offered hospitality to the grieving widower as he was grieving the recent death of his wife, and now works with one of the local schools in their breakfast program.

We are deeply grateful for the partnership with Mieke. Mieke is using her gifts in such ways whereby our Christian faith community can continue to bear witness to God's in-breaking kingdom.

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## Next steps

After nearly four years and seeing how COVID would affect the Parish House vision, we're ready to embark on a fundraising tour. The concept is as follows:

- We are looking to fund mission work
- Parish House calls to plant a missionary in Longford subdivision. However, the neighborhood is much more than just the Longford subdivision. The family who moves into the Parish House will become the conduit for the congregation to engage the neighbourhood on the south side of Davis Dr.
- We believe Parish House will accomplish several things:
  - Build upon the work we've been engaged in for 15+ years.
  - Provide additional growth opportunities and strengthen our community partnerships
  - Allows us to have a healthier balance of providing for congregation's existing spiritual needs while building upon relationships with the neighbourhood.
  - Natural extension of our work in *Partnership for Missional Churches*

If you or your congregation are willing to engage in a conversation concerning possible financial support, please let us know so we can provide you with additional details.

# Walking The Streets, cont'd

Should I leave? Should I still knock on the door? I didn't know the circumstances of the tears and I didn't want to interrupt. Before I could decide what to do, the front door opened and the gentleman motions me to come in. *"Is everything okay?" "Yes." "May I ask why the tears?" "Because back in our country the pastor always walked the streets and knocked on the doors. In this country, we've never seen a pastor walk the streets and my wife is very happy to see you walk the streets."*

Pastors walk the streets all the time (or at least they should). When we walk the streets we notice what one may not notice when driving through a neighbourhood. While walking we might notice the old man sitting at the side of the house, tucked under some trees. We might notice the stroller outside the front door. If one walks the streets in the neighbourhood enough times, we notice who has their lawn mowed and who doesn't; we might even notice a family who makes a sudden move out of the neighbourhood. When we walk the streets, we become investigators of what's happening in the neighbourhood.

Something else happens when we walk the streets: the neighbourhood takes notice. In the neighbourhood in which my family lives, I know the "regulars" who walk past my house and into the park. Over time, these "regulars" feel comfortable enough to stop and talk. An old man leans against my fence and asks how my tomatoes are growing this year. A middle age man stops and asks what wood working project my kids have started or left unfinished. A mom stops and inquires when the next neighbourhood game of "grounders" will be played at the park beside our house. Over time, I learn who these "regulars" are and for many, we find a way to begin a conversation and to build community.

It had been about three weeks since I had walked the streets. Too many funerals and other events kept me from walking the streets. Susan stops in the building and asks, *"Everything ok? I haven't seen you walk the streets."* I see Mark at Tim Horton's and Mark mentions to me that his mom hasn't seen me walk the streets. As a result, I carve out time the following week and start my 30 minute walk.

On this particular walk I notice the basement apartment where a single mom with three boys lives is vacated and I make a note to check in with the school to make sure everything is ok. I notice a new family who moved into an upstairs apartment. I stop in and see Pauline and end up sitting outside in her makeshift shed for 15 minutes. I see Chris sitting on his front porch so I walk up and spend five minutes with Chris talking about the hot peppers growing on his front yard. I turn the corner and two kids from Summer Camp are at the mailbox. They tell me about school and what's happening in their lives. I turn the corner again and stop in to see Jenny and get to hold her nine month old grandson. I talk with Terry, who is coming down from a late night binge. I make my way back to church and I see a ninety-five year old named Annie riding her scooter. We stop and talk on the side of the road.

My thirty minutes has taken a lot more than thirty minutes. Continuing to make my way back

to the building, I am standing at the light waiting for the walk signal. I meet Russ. Russ has a few groceries in his buggy. "What's up Russ?" "Nathan. So glad to see you. The church meal was really good. Those leftovers I took home for my kids to eat lasted two days. That was some really good spaghetti and meat sauce. When's the next meal?" We talk while walking down the slight hill towards the church building when Russ suddenly develops a look of confusion. "Nathan. Why are you walking the streets? No one walks the streets unless we have too."

Churches are really good at waiting for "the other" to find us. We purchase high-end video equipment so we can provide a worthwhile YouTube Sunday service. We go to great lengths to have a social-media presence. We spend a considerable amount of money to hang a new sign. We want a good curb appeal. We want a good on-line experience. Nothing wrong with this.

However, when our churches make the shift to become "neighbourhood churches" rather than "drive-in churches", we need people to walk the streets. And it doesn't have to be the pastor who walks the streets? What would happen if a small group decided to walk the streets together and pray for the neighbourhood? Might new friendships and new forms of community emerge as people from the church walk the streets and take notice of what's happening, while also being noticed? Put on your shoes and go for a walk!

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## Riding the Bus



Food security is a significant concern in our neighbourhood. As a result, we partnered with the local food bank and rented a bus during the summer so that families could have transportation to and from the food bank. Check out the full story in [Volume II of Parish House stories](#).

"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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