# St. Philip's Re-Ordering Working Group

# **RECOMMENDATION TO PARISH COUNCIL**

### April 19, 2020

### **Background**

The Re-ordering Working Group (the "RWG") was tasked with considering what physical changes, if any, would improve the use of our church facilities, including enhanced and expanded options for worship, special events, and increased rental opportunities from existing and new users.

The RWG was constituted in April 2019 and met several times throughout the past year. The members of the group were Ursula Bell, Pat Brandon, Stuart Hallam, Erin McDougall, Brian Mix, Michael Murray, Sarah Ruddle, Barry Smith, Mike Wenzlaff, and Duncan Wilson.

The RWG reports directly to Parish Council.

#### Nature and Scope of Recommendation

This report to Parish Council recommends a change to the current main church seating.

The seating in our church has been a topic of discussion for many years. Our current seating consists largely of relatively immovable 13' long old-growth fir pews, fixed to the floor in rows facing the front. The pews are decades old and in need of wholesale refinishing, the cost of which was estimated at \$42,000 in the 2017 Building Assessment. This estimate did not include structural repairs, which many of the pews now require. Repair or replacement of these pews is necessary for both comfort and safety, as well as being a much-needed restoration of our main public space.

Despite the deteriorating condition of our existing pews and the restrictions the fixed seating places on potential other uses of our main worship space, until now St. Philip's has never undertaken an organized, extensive, and representative survey of new seating options, or had the resources to make substantial changes. However, our recent Capital Campaign, *Under Our Roof and Beyond Our Walls*, raised significant funds for capital projects, including restoring and renewing our physical facilities. This offers a unique opportunity to make substantial and enduring changes which will benefit our community now and into the future.

Before making this recommendation, the RWG considered more than a dozen commercially available products comprising over 20 combinations, and viewed several physical examples. The RWG also sought quotes from two local manufacturers regarding reusing our existing pews.

The RWG believes that the final recommendation made in this report is by far the best of all options considered. It is respectfully submitted that approving this recommendation will support and enhance our existing worship, expand potential uses of our worship space, honour the gift given to us by past parishioners in our current pews, limit the environmental impact inherent in making a change, support the local economy, and leave an enduring legacy for future parishioners.

### Recommendation

# The RWG recommends that the current church pews be replaced with new, light-weight stackable pews, manufactured locally by reusing the wood of our existing pews.

The prototype below was made out of the wood of one of our existing pews by a local carpentry and design shop. This option is aesthetically beautiful, maintains a traditional look, and allows for flexible seating plans. It also honours the gift of our existing pews from past parishioners, refreshes our worship space, has a limited environmental impact, creates an enduring legacy for future parishioners, and is one of the most cost-effective options of the more than 20 considered.



# Construction and Design of the New Pews

The wood for the new pews will be sourced almost entirely from our current pews. There is enough wood in each of our 13' pews, including the kneelers and book racks, to make two new shorter, lightweight, and stackable pews. The only exception will be the legs, which will be built out of matching old-growth fir. There will be very little waste wood, as only the ends of the current pews are unsuitable for re-use in the proposed new pews.

The old pews will be removed, disassembled, planed, rebuilt, and delivered four at a time.

Each new pew will be 5'9" long, weigh 56 lbs, and can be stacked up to five high on wheeled trolleys for easy moving and storage.

Two new pews will meet up without any gap to form one row 11'6" long, the length of the pews currently set inside the arched columns in our nave. The remaining 18" of space (created by the reduction of length from 13' down to 11'6") will accommodate wheelchairs, walkers, or single movable chairs along the side aisles, and the lack of arms on the new pews will make it easy to slide on or off, improving the accessibility of our worship space for differently-abled parishioners.

The new pews will have exactly the same geometry and dimensions of the old pews, with the exception of length. This simplifies the construction process and keeps costs down, as the existing planks can be used without significant redesign. The joinery is solid and durable, with no visible hardware. The outward curvature of the back leg creates a mechanical resistance to tipping, making the new pews very stable even when leaned on from behind. They will be finished with a commercially available polish, allowing easy maintenance and touch-up of any damage on-site.

Each new pew will have a book rack that can hold hymnals, Bibles, service books, information cards, or personal items. The pews can be stacked without removing the items from the book rack.

The manufacturer can begin work immediately and estimates that it will take three to four months to rebuild all of our existing pews into new stackable pews.

## Number of New Pews, Configurations, and Seating Capacity

As our current rows are quite closely spaced, it is proposed that the number of rows per side be reduced from 14 to 13. Each new row will then be made up of two shorter pews, meaning that 52 new pews are required to fill our traditional configuration of parallel rows with a centre aisle.

The proposed new pews will also be easily movable into configurations other than our traditional parallel rows. Possibilities include angled-in rows, semi-circles, parliamentary-style rows, or small group meeting areas. They can also be partially or completely removed, leaving empty spaces. This will enable us to accommodate alternative styles of worship, children's activity areas, concerts or other events which require a large performance area, community meetings, weddings "in the round", art displays, labyrinth walking, and any number of other possibilities.

The new pews will seat up to 208 people. This is a reduction of 38 seats from our current seating, due to the removal of one row and slightly shorter new rows. However, this reduction can be compensated by adding chairs for major church holy days, concerts, and popular events. We have space to add approximately 110 chairs, using the side-aisle row ends, the north transept, and the open space in front of the organ pipes, for a total of 318. Prior to the recent re-ordering of the north transept, we had a maximum capacity of 291 people with our traditional arrangement.

While the RWG is currently recommending replacement of the main church seating only at this time, the scope of the project could be expanded to include the choir, small chapel, and north

transept. An advantage of working with a local manufacturer is that such expansions could happen as funding and need arises, with custom designed and built solutions using our existing materials.

### Cost

The quote to manufacture each new pew is \$1850, including removal and disassembly of our existing pews, construction of the new pews, and delivery. With taxes and some additional cost for trolleys, the overall project cost will be a little over \$100,000 for 52 new pews.

By way of comparison, this is marginally less than the lowest-cost option of commercially available stackable pews from ICS in Ireland, and is approximately 70% of the cost of the most expensive stackable pew option from Luke Hughes in England.

Although responsibility for making a financial decision was beyond the scope and authority of the RWG, the members were conscious of both the cost and the value of any proposed new seating when making this recommendation. While there are stackable chairs available for less than the cost of the recommended option, the RWG is of the opinion that the traditional aesthetic, flexibility of use, durability, and low environmental impact of the recommended option outweighs any cost savings that would result from purchasing off-the-shelf stacking chairs from a commercial supplier. We also value supporting our local economy through partnerships with our neighbours.

## Summary

The RWG recommends to Parish Council that the seating in our church be replaced with new pews manufactured locally using the wood of our existing pews.

The proposed new pews are lightweight and stackable, allowing for flexible seating options and making new uses of our worship space possible.

The proposed new pews are aesthetically beautiful, stable, durable, and traditional looking. They have book racks for hymnals, Bibles, and other items, and will support our traditional worship as well as enable new forms of worship and other events through flexible use of our space.

The proposed option is also environmentally responsible, supports our local economy, honours the gift of our existing pews from past parishioners, and creates a lasting legacy for future parishioners.

The cost is reasonable for the product acquired and competitive with other options considered. The manufacturer can begin construction immediately with minimal disruption.

Respectfully submitted, *The Re-Ordering Working Group* 

The following pages contain further photos of the recommended pews.







