



**The Church of  
St. John the Divine**

## How a leaky church roof became an act of God

— by The Reverend Canon Dr. Harold Munn for the Diocesan Time

“You told me I’d only have to visit two or three people,” the visitor complained, with a twinkle in her eye. Laughter all around.

We all knew the feeling. The visitor team of twenty people were celebrating what a great time they’d had doing the campaign for a new church roof. The old one looks like you could pasture goats up there.

“Well, I lied!” replied the warden. More laughter.

“You sure did! I ended up visiting seven families.”

“And you loved every minute, didn’t you!”

“You’re right about that – I met so many people I hardly knew before. We should do this every year! I’ve never had so much fun.”

Another visitor then accused the consultant of lying. “And talking about minutes, he told us that the visits would take about 45 minutes. And most of the people I visited wouldn’t let us out of their homes for two hours! They had so much to say it was amazing listening to their ideas.”

Another voice chimed in. “I had two people come to me to complain because they hadn’t had their campaign visit yet! I told them it was hard to do 20 visits in one week, but they weren’t convinced. They wanted their campaign visit and they wanted it now!”

The reminiscing went on.

“Remember how our consultant told us about the visitor’s prayer as you walk up to their door? ‘Dear God, please let them be out.’” Everyone chuckled. Everyone had prayed it.

One visitor said to the rector, triumphantly, “Your prayers work! Remember? I was your first visit and I was out when you visited me!” “Sure,” replied the rector, “But then I prayed you’d turn up in half an hour, and you did!”

There were more stories, without anyone identifying names.

“Remember when we were about to give that person their pledge card and a raccoon walked across their lawn? We had to start over again!”

“And remember the house with the beach umbrella which caught the wind, lifted the table right off the ground and soaked us in our host’s lemonade?”

“Remember the couple who’d baked those delicious goodies for us and then talked so much they never actually offered them to us, and then they complained we hadn’t eaten anything when we left!”

“One of my people had been driving down Fort street at four in the morning going to work, looked up and

saw our church burning down fifty years ago.”

The stories, the laughter and the sense of wonderful accomplishment went on.

The consultant had said it would be fun. We had all smiled condescendingly. We knew that was just to soften us up. Visiting people for an enormous sum of money in a financial recession wasn't going to be fun.

He said that no visitor would ask for money, and that if anyone offered money during the visit we were to politely refuse. The rector's heart sank. This was going to be a disaster.

He said we would spend most of our visits listening to parishioners talk about the future of our church. Financial information about the roof repair would be a small part. People would never fill in a pledge cards while the visitors were there. That would happen in the week or so after the visitors had left. The visitors would never know what, if anything, had been pledged by any of their visits. Seemed like a great way for everyone to avoid the issue. We wondered if he knew what he was doing.

He said he would train visitors to go out in teams of two. Nobody would go alone, one person would lead the conversation from a booklet we would give each household, and the other person would, with permission, take notes. We'd sit around the kitchen table and eat goodies. And nobody would visit anyone they weren't comfortable with. We could all choose who we wanted to visit. It all seemed too good to be true, and it probably was.

And above all there would be no secrets, no tricks, no manipulation and no pressure. Anybody in the congregation could ask anything they wanted, and we would tell them. But what if the congregation figured out how we were doing this? The whole effect would be lost. This definitely didn't look like a success.

The consultant did insist this was to be about God and Christ. The whole campaign was not really about the money, but it really was about God's call to our congregation. You could almost feel everyone parsing this. The right language for a religious organization. Sure it wasn't about the money. Sure!

But he said it in such a way that we realised he really meant it. We weren't sure we did.

In a quiet moment alone with him, I asked why he did this for a living. He said it was because he hated fundraising. It took me a moment. “You're serious? This isn't about fundraising?” “It isn't about fundraising. It's about holy matters, about God's call to us.” There wasn't much more to say.

So we hired him to do a survey in the congregation to get some proof that the enormous sum we needed was possible. A lot of people on fixed incomes. A lot of people whose investments had tanked. Not much success in growing the annual envelope givings the last few years. No point getting involved in a major campaign if it was going to be a failure.

He interviewed a cross-section of the congregation as well as people in the non-church community and came back with a figure that astounded us. “That's exaggerated,” I thought to myself, “But it's better to get something than nothing.” So we went ahead.

At the end of February, Vestry approved the campaign. In March we planned and organized. In

April our consultant trained the visitors and the visitors practiced on each other, doing real visits and making their own commitments. In May the visits started in earnest and continued into June and part of July. When the official wrap-up Sunday came, visitors from virtually every pew came forward to be

thanked and they were greeted with a long round of applause from the congregation. The new energy, confidence and hope were palpable.

And when, in late July, the financial figures were announced you could hear the gasps. \$700,000 had been pledged, and pledges were still coming in. Exactly what the consultant had predicted. About a third of that will go to new ministries to be decided by a Vestry on the basis of those notes taken during the visits, and the rest, with significant amounts still to come from the wider community, will replace the deteriorating and leaky roof shingles.

We expect to be able to use slate – the original covering used in the 1912 construction. Slate lasts a hundred years. Which is a pity because we will have to find another excuse to have so much fun again in our lifetime.

The goal isn't met yet. We will need another \$300,000 to get that slate on the roof. That would feel daunting except that the campaign is continuing and if the past is anything to go by, it will happen. We started with little faith and we continue into the next phase of the campaign in faith that is strong and secure. We know there are still many people who would love to do their part to keep the roof in good shape so God's ministries can continue to flourish under it.

We thank God, working through remarkable leadership, both in our consultant and in congregational leaders, for what continues to feel to us like a miracle. In every visit the campaign enacted God's kingdom of respect, of providing freedom, of thoughtful challenge, and of being serious about listening to the call of God. And we received in spirit and in finances more than we could ever have asked or imagined.

Visit [www.aspirecampaign.ca](http://www.aspirecampaign.ca) for more information about the roof, and for ways to make a donation. Our consultant is Rob Waller, an Anglican priest from Vancouver – [www.waller.ca](http://www.waller.ca)

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