

Media contact: Lesley Bentley  
Cell: 604.261.9495  
Email: [lesleybentley@mac.com](mailto:lesleybentley@mac.com)

**For Immediate Release**

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## **Largest Anglican Church Congregation in Canada Leaves Historic Church Home Because of Differences in Belief**

- *Differences in belief lead to loss of buildings for Vancouver congregation*
- *Supreme Court decision upholds liberal Diocese as intended ministry*
- *St. John's 100-year history to continue at new location in Vancouver*

**VANCOUVER, BC – September 8, 2011** – St. John's Vancouver Anglican Church, the largest Anglican congregation in Canada, will move from its present historic location on Granville Street and Nanton Avenue, as a result of an on-going world-wide upheaval in the Anglican Communion, the 80 million member Christian Protestant denomination formed 500 years ago under King Henry VIII of England.

In what may be the greatest rupture in Christianity since the Reformation, disagreement over basic Christian beliefs has separated Anglican congregations around the world into two camps, usually labeled orthodox and liberal, with those holding to historic, Bible-based values and beliefs in the vast majority. The St. John's Vancouver Anglican congregation has aligned itself with the mainstream global Anglican Church, rather than continue as part of the local, more liberal Diocese of New Westminster. The decision by this congregation and sister parishes resulted in frozen bank accounts and a court action to determine which party was conducting the ministry for which the buildings were intended.

A Supreme Court of Canada decision in June, 2011 confirmed that the Diocese of New Westminster, part of the Anglican Church of Canada, provides the sort of ministry for which the landmark Granville Street (St. John's Shaughnessy) buildings were intended, forcing the large congregation to seek a new facility.

"After a 10 year process of participation with others around the world, seeking to repair the tear in the fabric of the Anglican Communion, our appeal has been dismissed," explained Canon David Short, Rector of St. John's Vancouver. "As we believe it is more important to submit to the authority of God in his Word than the institutional authority of a church that has abandoned core Christian beliefs, it means we will have to move from our current buildings. Nothing has changed in our commitments, what has changed is our structural alignment and now our physical location."

The underlying, central issues of belief are: the authority of God's Word in the Bible, the uniqueness of Jesus Christ, and the need to be saved by Him. St. John's, along with the majority of Anglicans worldwide, joyfully upholds the historic biblical faith, expressed in the founding Anglican affirmations.

Canon Short continued, "This decision brings relief at moving from the posture of contending for the faith, to one of proclaiming, rejoicing and growing in that faith. We move forward in unity with many in Vancouver and around the world who confess Jesus Christ as Lord."

St. John's Vancouver, which has been meeting at its current location for almost 100 years, will continue to be led by its present clergy, Canon David Short, Rector, Venerable Daniel Gifford, Associate Minister, and Rev. Aaron Roberts, assisted by Canon Dr. J.I. Packer, Honourary Assistant Minister and a world-renowned published theologian, a staff of 15, and by the Trustees of St. John's Vancouver Anglican Church.

The new location secured by St. John's Vancouver is at West 37<sup>th</sup> Avenue and Baillie Street and belongs to Oakridge Adventist Church, which has graciously offered to share its building. St. John's Sunday services will start in Oakridge on September 25, 2011 and all other mid-week activities are planned to continue as normal in the new location.

All those who visited St. John's Granville Street location in the past, new neighbours in the Oakridge location, and all visitors and residents in Vancouver are welcome at the services, prayer times and church events. Special events are planned during the transition period and special welcoming services will be held.

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**About St. John's Vancouver (Anglican) Church:**

St. John's Vancouver Anglican Church is a community of Christians dedicated to loving God by spreading the name of Jesus Christ. The Church continues in the Anglican way, by preaching, believing and seeking to obey God's Word in all aspects of life. Church services are held on Sundays at 8 a.m., 10 a.m. and 6:30 p.m. Evensong is on Tuesdays at 5:30 pm, a range of programs for adults and youth take place during the week, and many small home group Bible studies meet weekly throughout the Vancouver Lower Mainland. St. John's supports over 20 local and international missions and help organizations. St. John's is a member of the Anglican Network in Canada (ANiC) and the Anglican Church in North America (ACNA).

For more information please visit our website at: [www.stjohnsvancouver.org](http://www.stjohnsvancouver.org) or phone 604.731.4966

**Media Contact:**

Lesley Bentley  
St. John's Vancouver, People's Warden  
604.261.9495  
[lesleybentley@mac.com](mailto:lesleybentley@mac.com)

A backgrounder is available.

On Sunday September 25, 2011 St. John's Vancouver (Anglican) Church, the largest Anglican congregation in Canada, will begin services and ministry at a new location at 5350 Baillie Street, Vancouver, about 2 km from its existing location at Granville and Nanton Avenue.

The move will be made as a result of a Canadian court decision that determined the Nanton building is to be used for the Anglican Diocese of New Westminster, of which we were part.

The move is an external sign of what may be the greatest upheaval in Christianity since the Reformation, as foundational Christian beliefs are currently under attack within the church itself. Just as with the Reformation, the foundational issue is the blurring and compromise of the good news of Jesus Christ and the elevation of the authority of church leadership over the authority of the Bible.

For the latter half of the twentieth century the Anglican Church in the global west, along with some other denominations, has drifted away from traditional Christian orthodoxy and into liberalism and relativism. This drift has been seen in the teachings and leadership around many core tenants of the faith. The authority of God's Word given in the Bible, the uniqueness of Jesus Christ, our individual need to be saved from sin – and even the definition of sin – have been denied, altered or completely rewritten by liberal branches of the church who have sought to keep up with the contemporary viewpoints of the age. As a consequence, the Anglican Church world wide is essentially dividing, and the Anglican Church of Canada has experienced a decades long downward spiral in attendance and finances.

A number of Canadian Anglican congregations and many individuals in other congregations across Canada have resisted this shift, believing instead that their faith should inform their thinking about the changes in society, and not have society's norms of today redefine their faith. But orthodox and evangelical Anglicans in the Diocese of New Westminster and in the Anglican Church of Canada found very little space and respect for these views.

In 2002 the Diocese of New Westminster unilaterally, and without national or international support from the Anglican Communion, passed a motion which was endorsed by their bishop to allow the blessing of same-sex unions. This action brought clarity to the foundational differences in belief between ourselves and the local Anglican Diocese. Despite pleadings from orthodox members no mutually acceptable Canadian solution was offered and international Anglicans stepped in to offer support and oversight.

The Global South bishops of the Anglican Communion encouraged and endorsed the Rev. Gregory Venables, the Archbishop of a South American Province of the worldwide Communion, to offer temporary, emergency episcopal oversight to the orthodox congregations in Canada. This oversight was gratefully accepted and Archbishop Venables and many other leaders of the Global South group have visited the orthodox Canadian church, including St. John's, offering both pastoral and episcopal oversight from within the Anglican Communion.

The actions in the Diocese of New Westminster by its synod and bishop, and similar actions across Canada and in the United States, have caused the Anglican Communion world wide to fracture. There are now two distinct forms of Anglicanism operating in the world.

This upheaval led to the creation of the Anglican Church in North America (ACNA). ACNA is a nascent and fast-growing orthodox Anglican province in North America. It allows its member congregations and individuals to be fully orthodox in their Anglicanism and to remain connected to the worldwide Communion. While not yet officially recognized by the Archbishop of Canterbury, the province is recognized and endorsed by the majority of Anglican Provinces around the world and by the vast majority of worshipping Anglicans.

At the time that St. John's and three other Lower Mainland churches joined the ACNA, the Diocese of New Westminster caused banks to freeze the bank accounts of two of the parishes and dismiss their democratically elected trustees. The four churches responded by asking the Supreme Court of British Columbia two main questions: does the diocese have the authority to fire duly elected trustees of a parish, and who is upholding the ministry for which the church property was intended?

The judgment came back in November 2009 stating that the diocese did not have the right to fire duly elected trustees but that the buildings' use had to be in accordance with the Anglican Church of Canada.

St. John's along with the three other churches, after prayer and discernment, decided to appeal the decision on the building's use. The diocese did not counter-appeal on the trustee issue. In November 2010 the British Columbia Court of Appeal, after correcting many individual points of law in the initial judgment, still agreed on how the buildings had to be used. Once again the four churches exercised their democratic rights and sought leave to appeal to the Supreme Court of Canada. In May 2011 the Supreme Court declined to hear the appeal and the legal proceedings ended.

St. John's Vancouver (Anglican) Church will now vacate the Nanton Avenue property entrusting it to God and the Diocese of New Westminster with prayers that the Gospel will be taught and flourish under their stewardship.

The congregation of St. John's has always known that losing the building was a strong possibility. It is a testament to the faith and love of the congregation that they were willing to take the risk. The unity of the congregation through the process has been remarkable. At no point was a decision made that passed by a vote of less than 90% support.

So it is with admitted sadness that the congregation will depart the building which they have paid for and maintained all these years, where countless baptisms, confirmations, weddings, and funerals have been celebrated and where many loved ones' ashes are interred in the memorial garden.

However, it is with faith, confidence in God, and a certain degree of excitement to see what God has in store for us, that we move on to this new chapter in our lives together at a new, interim location.

Moving is always a big deal. Moving the largest Anglican congregation in Canada is a challenge. However, we are deeply grateful for the support of many other Christian groups and denominations that have helped us and prayed for and with us through these transitions. We are extremely grateful to God that we will be able to maintain our full complement of services, Bible studies, children's and youth programs, counseling programs and other activities.

As well as the regular services and activities of St. John's Vancouver (Anglican) Church, many special events have been planned around the transition, especially in September. For specifics on events, dates and times please go to [www.stjohnsvancouver.org](http://www.stjohnsvancouver.org).