

CHAIR OF THE BOARD

On Sunday morning, March 8, 2009, one of the hymns we sang was VU 601, *The Church of Christ in Every Age*. I was struck by how appropriate the words are for the congregation of Cochrane Street United Church at this time. This is a relatively new hymn, written by an English Methodist minister, Fred Pratt Green, in 1969. He did not know us, but his words are meaningful for us. His challenge to all churches is found in the first verse: *The church of Christ in every age,/ beset by change but Spirit led,/ must claim and test its heritage/and keep on rising from the dead.*

We have been indeed “beset by change” in the past year. These changes, for the most part, have not been welcomed. Our minister has been on stress leave for a large part of the year. Our organist of 16 years also retired at the end of December, 2008. However, as a congregation, we have been strengthened and we have been “Spirit led” as we have continued to be the church.

However, as we face another year, we have to make a very important decision about the future of Cochrane Street United Church. We know that our church building needs hundreds of thousands of dollars in repairs. We have a leaky roof that needs to be redone, and the interior of the sanctuary and hall needs expensive installations to bring it to safety and electrical codes. Can we take this on? Are we, as a congregation, able and willing to do this?

As I listen to you, the members of this church, I hear a number of answers. A few of you are confident, saying: *We love this church family and this building! We can do this. We have many gifts in this congregation and if we pull together, we can raise the money and we can survive. It will be a lot of work, we need the help of everyone, but it can be done.* Within this group of people, some are looking to development of the back of the church, and see possibilities where we can create revenue that will allow us to remain as a church family in this space.

However, some other people are not as optimistic. They are saying: *There are only a very small number of people struggling to keep this church going and to maintain this huge building. Look at the financial reports in our Sunday bulletin. We do not give enough in annual givings to even pay our operating costs! We are tired. We have volunteered our time and tried but we cannot survive as a congregation! There are not enough of us and the cost is too high.* For these people, it is time to look at other options. Can we stay together as a congregation but move to another building? Should we merge with another congregation?

Then, there are those who are silent. Among them are the sick and shut-in who can no longer attend church. There are also those who seem to be waiting for others to lead the way, but do not feel they should be doing it. Some in this group feel that they have done their share; some feel their lives are already too busy. They don't seem to realize that if they wait, the church may not be here for them when they feel it is time to get involved. Then, there are those who do not attend at all, except, perhaps at special times of the year, but they see this church as their church in times of need (such as for weddings and funerals). It is difficult to know what they are thinking and whether they would support the church if contacted.

I do not think we can postpone our decision much longer. In which direction will we move? With God's help, we must decide. Change is inevitable, whichever way we go. But we must decide!

Jean Brown
Chair