

The living heritage of St. James United Church

(notes for a lecture to the Quebec Religious Heritage Foundation)

By Rob Bull

It is a common sight on St. Catherine Street. People on the sidewalk stop in mid-stride, then turn and gaze in amazement at the splendid facade of a great Montreal church that has suddenly reappeared after being hidden for 80 years.

St. James United Church stands reborn in its new public square with its Victorian gothic front in pinkish sandstone, its two towers -- the west one shorter than the east -- its gargoyles and tiny stone dragons eating their tails.

And the great rose window, magnificently restored by Françoise Saliou, glows like a glittering kaleidoscope in the early evening while an electronic carillon rings out fine old Protestant hymns over the city.

Above the main entrance, the words – “The Lord is in His Holy Temple” (an excerpt from verse 4 of Psalm 11)-- are carved in stone in elaborate script and above that is a lively bas-relief of birds and animals – an owl, a doe, a rabbit, a squirrel, doves – emerging from a leafy vine with grapes or acorns in clusters and the stems turning into serpents’ heads, a reminder of the created world we come from when we enter this place of the Spirit.

If you look closely, you can see the lighter blocks of stone where the beams that supported the old commercial buildings were placed directly into the walls and that carried the weight of the stores and offices reaching out to the sidewalk that blocked the church from the city from 1926 to 2006.

You can still see some of the commercial structures on the sidewalk at the corners on either side of the square, upgraded with new glass panels reflecting off the church.

Montreal, Quebec and Canada have rediscovered a glorious part of their religious heritage and passers-by often stand in wonder and surprise.

For that matter, so do the members of the congregation.

The front of the church was hidden from the street by the brownstone stores and offices for so long that even the oldest can’t remember what it used to look like. One elderly lady recalled coming down the steps as a little girl holding her mother’s hand and marvelling at the horses and carriages waiting for congregation members at the curb. Of course she was only six at the time that the stores and offices were built into the walls.

When the cornerstone of St. James was laid in 1887, this was a respectable middle-class part of town on the edge of a new commercial district.

The very wealthy lived above Sherbrooke St. in the Square Mile or around Carré St-Louis. In Old Montreal, la rue St. Jacques (St. James St.) was the financial centre of Canada.

Early photographs show the church surrounded by two and three-storey houses. Just down and across the street was the second St. Gabriel's Presbyterian Church. First Baptist Church was on the northwest corner of St. Catherine and City Councillors. A couple of blocks further west were the Canadian Bible Society and Christ Church Anglican cathedral. Looking towards the east you could see sculptor Robert Reid's Montreal Marble and Granite Works studio and yard. Castle and Son, the stained glass window makers, were not far away on Bleury. All of them were involved in one way or another with St. James.

Methodists tended to name many of their churches after geographical locations as opposed to saints. The church on St. Catherine St. was the congregation's fourth home. The second and third ones had been on la rue Saint-Jacques or St. James St. So it was St. James Street Methodist Chapel, then Church and then colloquially Great St. James.

When the Methodists moved uptown from Great St. James, they merely dropped the word street from their name. The church just happened to be named after a street that was named for a saint. It was the largest Methodist church in Canada and the largest Protestant church in Montreal. And it was built on a tradition of partnership.

Protestantism in all its varieties is rooted in the wide-spread dissatisfaction of many Europeans with the practises, financial demands and power structures of the late medieval Roman Catholic Church and the spread of knowledge about the Bible that came with the invention of printing and the translation of Scripture from Hebrew and Greek into contemporary languages. Many saw a need to go back to the roots of the church as they understood them from their reading of the scriptures which assumed a central place in their worship.

While some groups like the Quakers and the Moravians took a more independent and original path, the new churches tended to cluster around two major communities – the Lutherans and the Calvinists.

In Canada, Anglicans tend to be closer to Lutherans in church structures and liturgy. The Presbyterians and their sister church the Congregationalists were inspired more by Jean Gauvin or Calvin, the French 16th-century theologian, and thus were more community-based and less hierarchical.

The Methodists were somewhere in between.

They began as a reform movement within the Anglican Church in the mid-18th century that quickly spread among English farmers and working-class people to Ireland and America. Its founders were John and Charles Wesley, two brothers who were Anglican clergymen.

John Wesley taught that true Christian faith is based on the Bible.

The inspiration of the Holy Spirit in everyday experience played a key role in the lives of believers and the way they interpreted the scriptures. So did Christian tradition and the common sense that God gave us all.

Methodist teaching is sometimes summed up in four particular ideas known as “the four alls:” All need to be saved – (the doctrine of original sin); All can be saved – (Universal Salvation); All can know they are saved – (Assurance) and All can be saved completely – (Christian perfection).

Wesley would tell to the minute exactly how on May 24th, 1738, he was filled with an understanding that salvation was by the Grace of God and not by the works of man. He was listening to a reading of Luther’s introduction to the Epistle to the Romans at the time.

John Wesley said he looked upon the world as his parish. When his populist preaching offended the hierarchy and he was banned from Anglican churches, he and his supporters took their message directly to the people, riding thousands of miles a year to preach his message of hope to vast crowds gathered in the open air and talking to small groups in meeting rooms, barns, assembly halls, private homes and warehouses.

For Wesley, religious experience was based on universal salvation and the individual’s personal interaction with God. “Whatever enemies you have,” he once said, “it is enough that you have a Friend who is mightier than them all. O let Him reign in your heart alone!”

He developed a system of spiritual exercises to be carried out in community by ordinary people and he trained lay preachers for leadership roles. His system was based on his four foundations of faith which came to be known as the Wesley quadrilateral – the Bible, personal experience of the Holy Spirit, Christian tradition and common sense.

A key aspect of Methodism was the class meeting. Classes of about a dozen to 20 people met outside of church once a week to pray and worship together, study the Bible, offer mutual support, share resources and raise money.

Methodist worship was often emotional and joyful and music played a significant role in their liturgy. John Wesley’s instructions for singing are at the back of the Voices United hymn books used today at St. James. “Sing lustily and with good courage,” he wrote. “Lift up your voice with strength. Be no more afraid of your voice now, or more ashamed of its being heard, than when you sang the songs of Satan.”

Charles Wesley, the poet of the movement, wrote hundreds of hymns, including “Come thou long-expected Jesus,” “O for a thousand tongues to sing,” “Christ the Lord is Risen Today” and “Hark the Herald Angels Sing,” all of which are sung at St. James.

Methodists laboured mightily to change the society around them. John Wesley once called American slavery “the vilest that ever saw the sun” and prayed that it would vanish away “in the name of God and the power of His might.”

He rejected the conservative notion that social behaviour should be formed and governed by rational and external institutions such as the church. He also believed that God could be known by the heart and not by the intellect. As a result, social reform had to begin with a change in the individual conscience.

And because all individuals were capable of seeking personal salvation, he believed that they could share equally in the politics of church and state.

He famously said, “ Do all the good you can, in all the ways you can,/ In all the places you can, at all the times you can,/ By all the means you can to all the people you can,/ As long as ever you can.”

When the Anglicans declared the Wesleyans to be dissenters and mocked them for their methodical approach to religion and their challenge to the established 18th-century way of doing things, they reluctantly started their own denomination.

The first Methodists came to Montreal in the 1780’s as loyalist refugees from New York after the American Revolution. A Mr. Tuffy, a layman who had ridden with John Wesley in England, would come down from the garrison in Quebec City to preach to them occasionally. He was a circuit-rider, a lay, itinerant minister.

In 1802, Rev. Joseph Sawyer, a young American travelling Methodist preacher visited Montreal and reported that there were enough Methodists to form a church.

In 1803, Samuel Merwin, another young American travelling minister from the Bay of Quinte circuit of the New York State Conference, (he was 26 at the time) established the first Methodist congregation in Montreal. A “class” of seven met in the first St. Gabriel’s Presbyterian Church in Old Montreal.

The Presbyterians were particularly hospitable. As well as the small group of Methodists, they were also hosting the Anglicans of Christ Church Cathedral at the time. It was the beginning of a respectful cooperation that has lasted in Montreal for more than 200 years.

During his 1802 visit, Sawyer decided to pay a social call on John Jehosophat Mountain, the dynamic Anglican bishop of Quebec, who reached for his cane and chased him out of his study shouting insults.

Mountain had written earlier in a letter quoted by Douglas J. Wilson in “The Church Grows in Canada” that the Methodists were “a set of ignorant enthusiasts whose preaching is calculated only to perplex the understanding, to corrupt the morals, to relax the nerves of industry and to dissolve the bands of society.”

You could understand why he would think so.

Nathan Bangs, a 28-year-old who served the growing Methodist community in Montreal in 1806-07, “had only rudimentary education and was a surveyor and later a school-teacher when he underwent a personal conversion in 1800 and became a Methodist itinerant preacher,” historian Nancy Christie wrote in an essay published in the Canadian Protestant Experience 1760-1990.

His immediate predecessor in Montreal, Samuel Coate was a barnstorming evangelical preacher, she writes, who was acclaimed as a marvellous speaker and was “the heaven-anointed and successful instrument of the conversion of hundreds.”

Henry Ryan who preached across Central Canada was a former professional boxer known for such stirring words as “Drive on, brother drive on! Drive the devil out of the country! Drive him into the lake and drown him!”

There were 20 Methodists in Montreal when, thanks to the efforts of Mr. Coate and donations from England, they built their first chapel in 1807 on rue St-Francois-Xavier down the hill from Place d’Armes where the Sacré-Coeur Chapel of Notre-Dame Basilica now stands.

American ministers were replaced by ones from Britain after the War of 1812 and the first Wesleyan Methodist minister who arrived in Montreal from England in 1817 was the felicitously named Rev. John B. Strong.

When that first building became too small for the growing congregation in 1821, the 119 members moved to la rue St. Jacques and the original little chapel eventually became one of the city’s first public libraries.

St. James Street Methodist Chapel was the centre of circuits that sent young itinerant preachers known as circuit riders on horseback on regular routes throughout the countryside up the Ottawa Valley and out into the Eastern Townships, preaching in fields, barns and private homes.

Lay leadership was important for Methodists because ordained ministers tended to be transferred every two or three years so as not to get too attached to a particular place or group. It was called the principle of itinerancy. When enough people at a particular point on a circuit would gather regularly, they would build a church. Dozens of white frame churches in the Eastern Townships and the Ottawa Valley have their roots at St. James.

Jane Greenlaw in "Choix pratique et choix des pratiques: Le non-conformisme Protestant à Montréal 1825-1842" published in the *Revue de l'histoire de l'Amérique française* in the summer of 1992, analysed the church registers and reports of daily, weekly and monthly activities and concluded that only about 11 per cent of the people of St. James could be considered middle-class during this period and about 89 per cent were working class, most of them relatively unskilled.

"A significant number of church members worked, lived and prayed together," she wrote.

"The large number of unskilled workers reflects the Methodists' ability to offer doctrines and practices that reflected the difficult conditions they faced and to be open to the unchurched."

One early minister, Rev. William Squire portrayed by long-time *Gazette* columnist and antiquarian Edgar Andrew Collard, came to Quebec from the West Indies where he had preached first to the slaves in Grenada and slave-owners had tried to kill him and then had been transferred to work with slaves in St. Lucia where he contracted malaria.

He became a circuit rider in the Townships, visiting farmers and their families in remote villages, preaching whenever people wanted to hear him and eventually marrying the daughter of one of the families he stayed with in Shefford.

At St. James, in 1832 he kept the church open for revival services throughout a terrible cholera epidemic during which one Montrealer in eight died. He held services for 30 nights in a row for frightened people, many of whom became Methodists.

He went on to serve under demanding and colourful circumstances in Stanstead and Philipsburg, QC, Quebec City, Kingston and Toronto before returning to Montreal as superintendent for missions in Eastern Canada.

After he died in October 1851 while nursing a dying man during another cholera epidemic here, more than 70 carriages followed his hearse to the grave and a large crowd walked behind them. He was the first person buried in Mount Royal Protestant Cemetery.

By then, of course, the third church – Great St. James which opened in 1845 -- was in full operation. It had 770 members and could seat more than 2,000 people. The cornerstone had been laid by James Ferrier, a member of the church since 1822 who served as Mayor of Montreal and Chancellor of McGill University, was a member of Quebec's Legislative Council and became a Conservative Senator in Canada's first Parliament. He was a trustee and Sunday school superintendent at St. James for decades. An immigrant and a self-made man, he was one of the wealthiest people in the city and one of the few rich men in the congregation.

The Methodist impetus to make basic education available to as many as possible so that everyone could fully participate in worship led to the creation of new schools, some of

which – like the British and Canadian School which opened in 1822 and was open to all boys and girls -- eventually developed into English-language public schools in Montreal.

The same impulse led to the creation of Sunday schools. And, in an effort to improve the training of ordained ministers, people from St. James helped start the Wesleyan Theological College that was affiliated with McGill University and now has been incorporated in the United Theological College.

Ferrier had a hand in all these developments.

A dozen new Methodist churches sprang up on Montreal Island, funded in part with seed money from St. James and with the leadership of members and former members of the congregation.

The church worked in partnership with Montreal Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians, Congregationalists and other Protestants to start the first YMCA in North America in 1851. A YWCA was started 24 years later.

St. James people were involved with others in the creation and continuing support of the Montreal General Hospital. They joined with members of other churches in the leadership of libraries and The Strangers Friend Society which worked with immigrants.

When other Protestant groups like American Presbyterians needed a place to worship as a congregation, they made arrangements to do so at the St. James St. Wesleyan Chapel. And in 1856, after Christ Church Anglican Cathedral on rue Notre Dame was destroyed in a fire, its people were invited to worship as a congregation at Great St. James until they had another building of their own.

Church members actively participated in the political debates of their time.

They lived through the 1837 rebellions. At least one Methodist chapel was taken over by and used as a barracks by the army and damaged by the soldiers stationed there. In 1849, Methodist families in Montreal were split in the argument about whether Canada should leave the British Empire and join the United States.

In the 1850's, the famous American abolitionist Harriet Beecher Stowe whose brother was a Congregationalist minister here preached against slavery at St. James. The pulpit she preached from is still in the current church hall.

And for years St. James people were bedevilled and divided on the subject of alcohol.

The church's own Temperance Society began in 1828 and for many Methodists the idea of temperance meant moderation in the use of alcohol.

In Montreal in the 1830's nearly everybody drank and many drank to excess. Some ministers drank. Early Methodists served port at communion. Some members of St. James sold wine and spirits in their stores.

Alcohol was a scourge of society in early 19th-century society. Drunks froze to death on the streets of Montreal in winter and fell into the river and drowned in the summer. Working men spent what little pay they earned on drink, leaving their wives and families nearly destitute. And St. James, as Ms Greenlaw has explained, was a working-class church.

The battle against booze became divisive when the extreme "teetotallers" got involved.

Rev. Nathan Mair, the historian of the church whose book "The People of St. James," was published in 1984, blamed the whole thing on the Irish Roman Catholics.

By 1840, a substantial number of St. James' new members had origins in Ireland.

And among the rapidly growing Irish Roman Catholic population of the city, Rev. Patrick Phelan, the first Irish priest in Montreal started a temperance association and one of its representatives laid one of the cornerstones for St. Patrick's Basilica.

The Protestant Irish at St. James decided not to be out-done. At a meeting of St. James class leaders in the winter of 1840, two members argued that only those who agreed to total abstinence from alcohol should be allowed to be members of the church. They were outvoted. One of them wrote what he thought about this decision to the Canadian Temperance Advocate newspaper and the Montreal Methodist Society responded with an angry denunciation. For decades, the argument moved back and forth and for long periods those who favoured total abstinence were in the ascendant.

Many Methodist women were particularly active in the cause and the political experience they gained in the Women's Christian Temperance Union helped them in the later fight for women's rights.

They also sang with men in the choir. The church music program played a leading role in 19th-century Montreal.

The Encyclopaedia of Music in Canada says that a St. James organist and choirmaster – Frederick Herbert Torrington who was in Montreal from 1856 to 1869 -- was considered one of the great musicians of his time in North America. As well as serving as the church's director of music, he taught privately and in several schools here, conducted several Montreal instrumental and choral groups and was a military bandmaster.

He later moved from Montreal to Boston where he taught at the New England Conservatory, played violin in what became the Boston Symphony Orchestra and gave organ recitals in several cities in the eastern USA, before he moved yet again, this time to

Ontario where, among other accomplishments, he founded what became the Faculty of Music at the University of Toronto.

The 1860's was a period of generous fund-raising for outreach. That was when St. James gave \$23,000 to east-end churches, \$27,000 to help the Ottawa St. church which was in a financial crisis and \$10,000 to the new Wesleyan theological college.

St. James employed a full-time city missionary to work with the poor, the sick, the newcomers to the city and those in prison.

So did other Protestant churches and together in partnership they created a common, non-sectarian funding agency, an ancestor of Centraide.

The period was also marked by serious public disputes between Roman Catholics and Protestants in Montreal.

In his history of St. Patrick's Basilica, for example, Alan Hustak notes that in 1853, when Alessandro Gavazzi, a former Italian priest, stirred emotions with his fiery preaching against the Roman Catholic church at Zion Congregational Church on Beaver Hall Hill, an angry Irish mob tried to break into the church and stop him. In the ensuing riot, 11 people were killed. Gavazzi was hustled out of town by a group of his supporters. Other historians note that one of those who helped him escape was Rev. John Jenkins, the senior minister at St. James.

T.P. Slattery wrote in *The Assassination of Darcy McGee* that a few years later, McGee tried to broker one of the great Canadian political compromises. He had already helped ease Irish Protestants out of the St. Patrick's Society of Montreal. (They founded the Irish Protestant Benevolent Society at St. James and also started a branch of the Orange Order at the church which was a militant temperance lodge).

McGee arranged that Irish Catholics would march on March 17th, St. Patrick's Day, in Montreal but not in Toronto and that Irish Protestants would march in Toronto on Orangemen's Day, the "Glorious" 12th of July, but not in Montreal. That particular truce held for a decade or so.

The parade compromise was quite satisfactory until 1875 when Rev. Leonard Gaetz, a popular fire-and-brimstone Methodist preacher from the Maritimes, was called to St. James. He was offended by all the public Catholic processions in Montreal and the fact that the Irish Catholic mayor – William Hingston – had invited the Roman Catholic bishop to bless the new City Hall.

In his biography of Hingston, Hustak notes that Gaetz insisted that Protestants be allowed to parade on the 12th of July in Montreal. They did so in 1875, marching out from Great St. James Methodist Church to the Orange Hall on Victoria Square where they listened to speeches, then marching back down to Nordheimer's Hall for dinner and more speeches.

Two women pulled out fistfuls of hair and ribbon from the head of a Protestant woman who was watching proceedings. A gunshot was heard and seven people were arrested for being drunk but generally things went pretty well.

The following year, in 1876, the Orangemen did it again. This time when a woman was attacked, a young Protestant man -- Thomas Hackett -- came to her rescue and was shot dead. There was another riot, feelings ran high for some time, songs were written in Hackett's memory and the Orangemen vowed to march again "knee deep in blood if need be."

It didn't come to that. Father Dowd of St. Patrick's preached for calm, Rev. Gaetz left St. James and the Orange Order in Montreal became more discrete.

In *Chronicles of St. James St. Methodist Church*, published in 1888, G.E. Jacques Jr, wrote: "Mr. Gaetz was a minister of great native eloquence who all too soon was forced to retire from the ministry, on account of the permanent failure of his health."

Today, in the 21st century, people from St. James have marched in the St. Patrick's Day parade and the minister has stood on the reviewing stand. The Orange Order no longer meets in the church and nobody at St. James seems to remember when it last gathered there.

Also in the 1870's, after the Mohawks of Oka split with their landlords, the priestly Sulpician Order, over their land rights and many left the Roman Catholic Church in protest, the people of St. James enthusiastically came to their aid and frequently raised funds for the work of the new Protestant church in Oka.

But generally the Methodists were so deeply involved with their own affairs that they had little time to worry about anything else.

By the 1880's, the Methodists at Great St. James St. in Montreal had an active and energetic congregation housed in the city's largest Protestant church. There were two lengthy worship services on Sunday, one at 11 a.m. and the other at 7 p.m. with Bible study classes in the afternoon. A third preaching service was held on Wednesday evening.

There was a large and active Sunday school, a Young Peoples' Association, a Christian Workers Association and a Young Men's Association.

On New Years Day, Protestant children from all over the city came to the huge Sunday School Rally at Great St. James. In 1887, 3,000 children took part, hymns were sung and everyone left with a small treat.

Throughout the years, when religious oratory was one of the greatest forms of public entertainment, some of the finest English-speaking preachers of the time spoke at St. James. So did some of the most prominent revivalists of the 19th century.

There were 20 classes at Great St. James in the 1880's, four of them led by women. And two women's organizations, the Ladies Aid Society and the Dorcas Society, were involved in outreach.

The Dorcas Society was a sewing circle formed in 1844 that met to make over old clothes and give them to the poor. The name shows the way the Bible was used to inspire Methodist social action. The society was named after Dorcas, the Greek name of Tabitha of Joppa, who is described in Acts: 9 v36 as a Christian disciple "who filled her days with acts of kindness and charity," particularly by making and repairing clothes for widows and orphans. She was given up for dead and revived by Peter.

The Lady's Aid Society was formed in 1857. It was founded partly as a sewing circle, partly as a fund-raising group and partly "to endeavour to create a feeling of sociability among the members of the church."

It met in private homes and the society's rules stated that refreshments at the meeting were "not to exceed tea, bread, butter, buns or muffins and one kind of cake." In 1867, it was agreed that the "gentlemen of the congregation" could join the ladies at eight o'clock "to assist in making the evening pass pleasantly."

And the Canadian Methodists, who like other Protestant denominations had split into separate organizations, were coming back together. By 1874, various Methodist churches of Canada – the Wesleyan Methodists of Eastern Canada, the Episcopal Methodist Church in Ontario, the Primitive Methodists, the Bible Christians and the New Connexion – had united in a single Methodist Church. In 1883, The Methodist Church of Canada with its affiliated schools, universities and theological colleges was created in a special meeting in Belleville, Ontario. The Presbyterians were going through a similar process at the time.

It still isn't clear why the leaders at St. James decided to move to St. Catherine Street.

Certainly many Montrealers including Protestants were moving uptown from Old Montreal which was becoming increasingly commercialized.

But two Roman Catholic churches – Notre-Dame and Notre-Dame-de-Bonsecours – remained active and prosperous. And the Methodist church on Great St. James was large and well used.

One suggestion is that they had become mainstream and wanted to mark their place among all the other great uptown churches. Rev. Mair quipped a century later that they had "an edifice complex."

The plan was to build a new church and support it with income from an office building, the seven-storey Temple Building to be erected on the site of the former church once it was demolished.

The architect for both projects was Alexander F. Dunlop, first president of the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada and designer of homes for the very wealthy. The house he built on the southwest corner of Sherbrooke St. and Stanley for example, for Lord Atholston, founder of the Montreal Star, still stands as an example of his work incorporated into the Alcan head office. Dunlop also built the Ekers Brewery, later recycled as the Montreal comedy museum and the Montreal Star building on la rue St. Jacques which was acquired by The Gazette in 1979. St. James was his only church although he later designed the bell tower for St. George's Anglican Church across the street from the Windsor Station..

For St. James, Dunlop came up with a plan for a church that from the outside looked like a Victorian impression of a French medieval cathedral.

It was built with red sandstone from a quarry in the Credit River Valley west of Toronto that supplied the stone for the Ontario legislature and it was trimmed with greenish sandstone from the Gaspé peninsula. The foundations were regular old Montreal grey limestone.

The St. James construction site was enormous and the work-force efficient. The entire building was completed in two years. The cornerstone was laid in 1887 by Senator Ferrier and the first service was held in the new sanctuary in 1889.

Unfortunately Ferrier did not live to see it. He died in 1888 and was the last person buried out of the old church.

As construction got underway, a group of church trustees toured the United States and central Canada looking at new church interiors. They settled on one they found in Akron, Ohio, with a low vaulted ceiling and hanging ogive arches resting on the walls, a large balcony drawing people forward, ground-level seats in oval formation with several aisles in classic Methodist fashion gathered around the Bible on the communion table as the focal point with an empty cross and the pulpit and choir behind it.

There was seating for up to 3,000 people. It was the largest Methodist Church in Canada at the time.

Aside from painting the walls occasionally and converting the lighting to electricity from gas in the early 20th century, the inside of the sanctuary has been basically unchanged..

The cushions on the ground-floor seats have been recovered but they still contain the original, late 19th-century stuffing of horse-hair and straw. At the time, Methodist sermons were lengthy and for a fee, families could reserve a pew with cushions. (As a rule, extremely lengthy sermons are no longer a problem at St. James).

The Methodists adapted the rest of Mr. Dunlop's design to their own purposes as well.

In a traditional late-medieval church, the rounded part behind the sanctuary was called an *apse* and generally held a chapel. Masonry arms spread out from the main body of the church like a cross and were called a *transept*.

In the new church, the *apse* was built first and adapted for outreach. That's where the Sunday school was along with a kitchen and various offices, halls and meeting rooms and the side entryways and stairs that brought people into the back of the building. The *transept* is a wide space at the front of the sanctuary, just before the communion table, pulpit, choir and organ loft.

It's significant that the people of St. James built the back of the church – where the weekday work and outreach took place -- first. The finished building cost about \$240,000 and it took an estimated \$150,000 to erect the Temple Building on the site of the former church.

In "Organs of Montreal" published in 1993, Karl Raudsepp said the organ in the new church was installed by Edward D. Wadsworth Ltd. of Montreal, Aberdeen, Manchester and London.

The contract was signed in 1888 but not completed to the satisfaction of the church until 1891. It was put at the front of the sanctuary – a normal Protestant placement but unusual in Montreal – with the console against the wall. The original instrument had three keyboards plus a full range of pedals and was hydraulically powered with a hand-operated pump.

But St. James had high expectations and placed great demands on its church organists and music directors and these were not always met. Edward Hilton, the organist both at Great St. James and at the new church was let go in 1891 after reports that he was unduly harsh with some of the young men and women in the choir.

He had a couple of short-term replacements and then W. I. Birks was hired.

Mr. Birks' job description said that he was: "to undertake the duties of organist and choir master of the church and to provide at his own expense the singers needed for the building up of an efficient choir; that he was to do three or more concerts each season to partly reimburse him for his expenses; that he was to take charge of the special services such as New Year's Day, Thanksgiving and Christmas and also the anniversaries and all for the sum of \$1,500 per annum with the use of the organ for pupils, they paying the cost of the water during lessons and practice with the understanding that this expense is to be the utmost limit that we shall be called upon to face."

Mr. Birks tended, however, to drop into a nearby bar for a drink after choir practice so he was dismissed in 1899 after five years service for having a bad influence on young people and the Music Committee was directed to choose a replacement who was both "a Methodist and a teetotaler."

The church decided to split the function and hired E. F. Waterhouse as Choir Director. Unfortunately, they couldn't keep their organists. They went through several including Mr. Hilton who was given a second chance and the brilliant young Lynnwood Farnham in his first Canadian church position before moving to the Anglicans.

Then, in 1908, S. R. Warren and Son of Toronto rebuilt the organ with an electro-pneumatic action and added another keyboard and half the \$6,000 cost was contributed by Andrew Carnegie. After that the organists tended to stay a little longer

Methodists were uneasy about having an image of the human form in their churches. It was feared that there could be a temptation to pray to the image instead of directly to God. The sculptors managed to get some decorative human faces into the sanctuary supporting the hammer beams under the balcony. But the first stained glass windows were in what was known as *grisaille*, relatively plain opaque glass but with the coloured designs of crosses, crowns and the occasional fleur-de-lys (among other things a symbol of the Trinity).

While the low and elaborate ceiling may have contributed to the sanctuary's wonderful acoustics, it was not high enough to allow the entire marvellous and very large rose window to be seen from the interior. False lancet windows in the balcony decorated with Huguenot crosses let the light stream in from it and gave a kaleidoscope effect.

The first figurative stained glass window was installed in the 1890's by Castle and Son at the back of the east wall of the sanctuary in memory of Senator Ferrier.

A magnificent and richly coloured Victorian creation, it shows a scene of Christ on the road to Emmaus at the moment when two disciples who had left Jerusalem after the crucifixion suddenly realized who had been sharing their journey for so long. It conveys the message that Christ is alive and among us although many people don't realize it and is an appropriate way to commemorate a man who was a Sunday School superintendent for decades.

Aesthetically, the new building was a great success. Some called it the Methodist cathedral of Montreal although Methodists didn't believe in cathedrals. There is a story told in several versions about an elderly English tourist being driven down St. Catherine Street and enquiring what that large building was. When the coachman replied that it was the local Methodist meeting house, the passenger remarked "Oh, the impertinence!"

In August 1912, it certainly impressed Abdu'l-Bahá, the son and appointed successor of the founder of the Bahai faith, during his tour of North America after being released from nearly 50-year sentence in a Turkish prison.

In one version of the story, Abdu'l-Bahá was apparently being driven from the Windsor Station to the home of architect William Maxwell (whose older brother Edward had served his apprenticeship under Dunlop during the construction of the church.) William was an early member of the Bahai movement.

Abdu'l-Bahá had his horse-cab stop so he could get out and look at St. James. He met one of the ministers of the church and made arrangements to give a talk there on the following Sunday night, one of several he gave in Montreal on economic justice, world peace and social cohesion. The notes of that speech became a significant document for the members of his faith. And the incident was the first of many inter-faith celebrations that occurred at St. James.

But the church had already given speakers a platform for political discussion.

Booker T. Washington, the Black American leader, spoke at St. James on Feb. 7th, 1906

Methodist women were taking on greater prominence in the congregation. In the 1890's, half the members of the St. James Quarterly Board were women. So were several class leaders.

In 1892, the Women's Missionary Society reported that "at last we may say that we are losing the fear of each other which prevents so many from praying and speaking in public."

And in 1906 at the request of the Sunday School the church hired Caroline Wilcox, its first deaconess, at a salary of \$350 a year. Deaconesses are lay women commissioned to full-time ministries of "love, justice and service." St. James started a special fund to hire deaconesses to work among the poor and transient.

In 1910, St. James in partnership with other Protestant churches started the non-sectarian Montreal City Mission. A Methodist church serving immigrants in east-end Montreal – The Church of All Nations – later joined the Mission and added to its outreach.

The New Years Day Sunday School rallies continued, drawing such large crowds that city transit authorities had to organize special measures to bring people to and from St. James. There was a young people's' group, the Epworth League named after Wesley's birthplace. And several renowned preachers passed through on their evangelical missions drawing huge numbers to the church.

But the worshippers in the fine new building were under great financial pressure. Despite cost-cutting measures imposed by the trustees, the construction costs had gone well over budget, particularly for the foundations and the roof. There were lawsuits against the church for, among other things, construction accidents. There were high interest rates to pay on loans which were supposed to be short-term but took longer than planned to repay. And in the early 1890's Canada entered one of the worst economic depressions in its history so the offices in the Temple building could not be rented.

By 1897, just 10 years after the corner-stone had been laid, and despite repeated fund-raising campaigns and personal loans and bequests from members of the Board of

Trustees, St. James had accumulated a debt of nearly \$600,000. At one point there was a resolution to sell the church. At another there was a proposal to move the sanctuary to a corner of the lot and build rental property on the rest of it.

The trustees assumed personal responsibility for the church finances and in 1899 one of them, John Torrance, wrote: "Why should I be expected to carry this crushing burden all alone, till it has almost ruined me and certainly destroyed my health, I cannot imagine nor do I think it fair."

By 1905, a cross-Canada campaign to pay off the debt of St. James and save the church had started. Newspapers like the Montreal Star and the Toronto-based Christian Guardian (the country's national Methodist newspaper) backed it up with stories of how much the people of St. James had contributed to build other Canadian churches and help outreach ministries.

There was even a song with words by Sarah E. Henderson and music by the Rev. J. D. Wilkinson called "St. James Church must be saved." Listeners were asked in the stirring chorus: "What would Jesus do?/ Oh what would Jesus do?/ Let this question echo through every heart./ Let us follow his footsteps and do our part./ Make sacrifice, set St. James free./ Show the Christ-life by our unity."

Ordinary Methodists across the country and women's associations and Sunday School children throughout Canada reached into their pockets and came up with vast numbers of small gifts. The St. James Sunday School itself raised \$1,200! Then the economy improved, the Temple Building was finally sold for redevelopment – it was demolished and replaced by a temple of commerce and in fact the main Montreal branch of the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce stands there today -- and the church was left with a mere \$75,000 debt.

And that was that or at least that's what everybody thought at the time.

By 1911, however, the church debt was rising again and middle-class members were starting to move further away from the city centre. The church was put up for sale at a suggested price of \$2 million and there was rising anger at the decision across the country. A letter in the Christian Guardian, for example, said: "St. James belongs to the Protestant church from the Atlantic to the Pacific in a way that no other church edifice does. Many people out of their very limited resources contributed something to the salvation of the building." So the sale didn't happen. Another fund-raising campaign kept the wolf from the door.

And in 1913, the church hired Rev. Charles A. Williams, an Irish Methodist minister working in Dublin, who was told his priority was to eliminate the debt. He organized another national campaign to raise \$100,000. Chester Massey, a member of Metropolitan Methodist Church in Toronto agreed to donate the final \$10,000 if the rest of the money was raised elsewhere. Timothy Eaton and the Eaton family of Toronto also helped. Rev. Williams campaigned personally and was credited with raising \$75,000. The debt was

largely paid off in the spring of 1918 towards the end of the First World War and Rev. Williams, by this time a major and army recruiting officer, moved on to Toronto shortly afterwards.

The war had a great impact on St. James. At the back of the sanctuary, there are two long lists of names of the men from the church who volunteered to fight – nearly 300 of them, most of them ordinary soldiers. Crosses mark the names of those who died. It was a huge contribution from a single congregation of about 1,000.

During the war, Rev. Major Williams had the church basement turned into a soldiers' club. Montreal was the transportation hub of Canada and troops would be brought in on trains from across the country to board ships in the harbor to go to Europe.

The showers installed for them are still used today by the St. James Drop-In Centre for homeless people. A kitchen was put downstairs and the church ladies fed and chatted with the visiting soldiers there. And on the east side of the basement a three-lane bowling alley was installed for their entertainment.

In February 1916, Emmeline Pankhurst, the great British suffragette who had been jailed several times for her actions in favour of women's right to vote, spoke at St. James. Canadian Methodist women were active in the fight for the vote and Ms Pankhurst was on good terms with the military authorities because she supported the war effort and women's greater place in it.

In Canada at the time, women could vote in several provinces but not in Quebec or in federal elections.

The church was packed when Ms Pankhurst spoke and the newspapers reported that hundreds were turned away. People were sitting in the balcony aisles and on the pull-out seats in the aisles on the ground floor. Others were standing against the wall.

One observer quoted by Rev. Mair described her that night as “a slender, well-poised woman, beautifully gowned with a voice of liquid sweetness which swayed a crowd as the wind stirs a field of grain. There is nothing in appearance, manner or voice which suggests the seeker of notoriety.”

As a result of the meeting, however, Montreal authorities decided that St. James was unsafe. The church was ordered by the Fire Marshal to nail in its pull-out seats after nearly 40 years of use and the legal number of persons permitted to gather there was drastically reduced. There would be other large gatherings at St. James although none would be as large as the one that listened to Ms Pankhurst.

But as a result, in part, of the efforts of Methodist women and those from other churches across the country and rallies like the one at St. James, Canadian women gained the right to vote in federal elections on May 24th, 1918, two years before those in the United States and 10 years before those in Great Britain. All British women were given the right to vote

in 1928. Quebec women had to wait until 1940 for the right to vote in provincial or municipal elections.

The great remembrance window in the west wall of the sanctuary commemorating the First World War was designed and painted by C. W. Kelsey who was born in Westmount but living in England when it was made and assembled by the Montreal Art Glass Company.

Its two side panels represent the allegorical figures of Justice, Temperance, Prudence and Fortitude – the four cardinal virtues (as opposed to the seven cardinal sins).

The central panel carries the image of a soldier, a bayonet at the end of his rifle, standing over other soldiers waiting in a trench while above them flies the British flag which Canadian troops fought under from 1914 to 1918.

Watching over them is a compassionate angel and above that in the upper left-hand corner is a poppy, a reference to the poem “In Flanders Fields” written by John MacRae, a Montreal soldier and McGill medical professor who died in the war. Across from the poppy is a highland thistle on a cross, a reference perhaps to the Black Watch Royal Highland Regiment of Canada whose armories are just a few blocks east of the church. Above the two are images of exploding shell bursts, one to each small panel.

It was paid for by another special fund-raising campaign and unveiled in a special service on October 12th, 1924, by Sir Arthur Currie, Chancellor of McGill and former commander of the Canadian Corps.

The war delayed but did not prevent the end of the Methodist Church of Canada. On July First 1925, the Methodists, the Congregationalists and most of the Presbyterians in Canada came together to form a new denomination – the United Church of Canada -- which is the largest Protestant denomination in the country.

It was the first union of churches in the world to cross historic denominational lines and received international acclaim. For St. James, it meant some changes in administrative procedures but relatively little in the life of the congregation.

The money problems, for example, didn't change. The cost of upkeep and repairs had been under-budgeted and the \$25,000 raised to pay for building repairs and the memorial window also helped pay off new accumulated debts.

With the growing commercialization of St. Catherine St., church members saw an opportunity to provide a reliable source of income by building stores and offices in front of the building.

Again there was widespread protest – the Montreal Herald, for example, ran a headline over one story that read “Hands Off the Westminster Abbey of Canada” and over another “Oppose Church Plans – indignant protest is made to scheme to put stores before St.

James.” But a congregational meeting to discuss the proposal approved the measure. Ernest Taylor later told Rev. Mair, “I was there that night . . . and I only heard one man who objected to it. He was a clergyman and he said, ‘Oh we can carry this church.’ Of course he had no money. And the congregation didn’t pay the slightest attention to him.”

The “temporary” stores and offices were erected in 1926 in front of St. James on the church’s land and leased to a private developer for 30 years. Access to the front doors of the church was through a tunnel under an arch on St. Catherine Street.

Above the arch was a red and blue neon sign made by Mr. Neon’s own company which was to become a downtown landmark.

The church disappeared from view.

There were problems almost immediately. The developer didn’t keep the entranceway clean and was lax in paying city taxes.

In 1929, Canada was hit with another terrible economic depression. By 1933, the company was behind in its rent and in 1937 the church took over direct administration of the buildings and continued to manage them for the next 65 years.

One of the first things the congregation had to do was pay several years worth of accumulated taxes.

There was always tension at St. James between the conflicting needs to maintain and support the building and the call to maintain and support mission and outreach.

Arthur Oliver Dawson, a lay preacher and trustee who served as treasurer for several years, reported, for example, in 1911 that “we are not leading as our fathers and grandfathers did.” He wanted a more aggressive policy of adapting St. James to its strategic position in downtown Montreal and serving the needs of the people who lived there.

And in 1927, reverends George Laughton and T. Anson Halpenny, the church ministers, reported that “the downtown areas of our Canadian cities must not be wholly surrendered to business and pleasure. Here we must minister to the intellectual, social and spiritual needs of the community.”

But another treasurer reported with some dryness in 1927 that: “in my humble opinion, we should set our own house in order and this will take all our resources for several years.”

One of the more colorful ministers at St. James United was Rev. Lloyd C. Douglas an American Congregational minister who served from 1929 to 1933 through the worst of the depression and was one of the best-selling novelists in the English-speaking world in the 1930’s and ‘40’s.

He had published a book about the miracles of the Bible for skeptics in 1927 and his first novel 'Magnificent Obsession' was published in 1929 at about the time he arrived in Montreal when he was 52 years old. It was an immediate success and was later turned into a movie twice. Two other novels quickly followed while he was at St. James -- Forgive Us Our Trespasses published in 1932 and Precious Journey, a Christmas story in 1933, both on religious themes -- before he resigned from the ministry and moved to California to become a full-time writer.

Douglas was an outstanding story-teller. St. James worship services and those of other downtown churches were broadcast on local radio and Douglas's sermons attracted a wide audience.

Collard wrote in The Gazette that Douglas's sermon titles were always intriguing. One of them was "Spiritual Cosmetics." He told a story about a young woman in the depression who was the sole support of her family.

Her father was out of work and jobs were scarce. She had to do without new clothes and other simple pleasures and she used to go to her room, think of life passing her by and weep. Then she would remember what she had to do, square her shoulders, dry her tears, put on some lipstick and rouge and go out to face the world. "Smear it on little girl, smear it on," Dr. Douglas would say.

Rev. David McLellan, a young Presbyterian minister, said he had an elderly woman in his congregation who listened to all the radio broadcasts. He asked her who was her favorite preacher and she told him it was Dr. Douglas. He asked her to describe a recent sermon but she couldn't so he asked her what the text was that Douglas had preached from. She considered briefly, then said, "I remember. It was 'Smear it on little girl, smear it on!'"

After Douglas retired from the ministry he wrote eight more novels, one of which -- 'The Robe' -- was turned into a lavish technicolor film starring Richard Burton and Victor Mature. But before he left Montreal, his daughter Virginia met A. O. Dawson's son at St. James and the young couple later married.

During the Depression, Deaconess Agnes Thompson visited hundreds of homes with canned goods and clothing, supported the Mother's Guild, helped fill in as secretary and teacher and was responsible for the Wednesday evening prayer service. She coordinated a social services committee which offered some help.

The church women sent bales of clothing to Saskatchewan which was devastated as the topsoil in the southern part of the province blew away. And various church boards contributed funds with other Protestants to an inter-church day centre for the unemployed and an employment office. Ms Thompson resigned in 1935 because of exhaustion.

"Where cross the crowded ways," a pamphlet about St. James by Rev. Halpenny published in 1935, outlines a weekly list of activities at the church that year at a time

when all the churches of Montreal were centres for community life before the invention of television and Sunday sports.

Sundays began at 9:45 am in the church hall with a meeting of the morning church school accompanied by a small orchestra. From 300 to 500 families attended the 11 a.m. service. At 2 pm the 60-voice choir met to rehearse for the Sunday evening service. There were various afternoon Sunday School classes and a men's group met in the basement for "hearty singing and inspirational addresses."

The evening service which began at 7:30 pm would attract from 1,400 to 2,000 people. And after that there was a "Friendly Half Hour" in the church hall which could last a little longer and offered "a varied program of music, pictures, addresses, etc." St. James had its own movie projector. The church sound system had been refurbished in 1934 at a cost of \$3,500 with A O Dawson paying \$1,500 out of his own pocket.

During the week there were meetings of junior boys and girls, a Young People's Society, and a Mother's Guild whose small children were gathered in "The Sunbeams" group while the mothers worshipped and socialized.

There were separate programs for teenaged boys and girls on Friday nights. Business and professional women gathered on Monday nights for supper and "helpful study or social intercourse." And young immigrant women working as domestics met on Thursday nights. The Ladies' Aid, the Women's Missionary Auxiliary and the Mission Circle met once a month.

The church had its own part-time sports director: Mr. Reginald P. Thomas, the moving spirit in the Inter-church Basketball League of Montreal.

St. James had three basketball teams in the league, one for women and two for men which practiced Saturdays at the gym in the High School of Montreal, now FACE school.

There was also basketball practice in the gym of a local elementary school and a Saturday physical education program for about 50 young people.

On Tuesday's a men's group bowled in the church basement. And about 60 young people from St. James met on Tuesday nights at Karry's Bowling Alley at the corner of Peel and St. Catherine for competitive bowling. There were five ladies' and four men's teams.

On the same night, a 30-piece young people's orchestra rehearsed in the church hall. The church choir had another rehearsal on Friday nights.

Music at the church was innovative and outstanding. As well as singing in at least two worship services a week, the choir and orchestra performed in concerts. The first performance of the Messiah in Montreal to Handel's original score was performed at St. James. So were several other great oratorios.

But the organ needed work.

In 1931, organist Stanley Oliver and the music and worship committee started pressing for “a four-manual organ re-arranged on modern lines with reeds thoroughly revoiced and with a modern console” guaranteed for 10 years plus an echo chamber and repairs and renovations to the choir loft. Mair says the trustees couldn’t see their way clear to find the funds needed to do this and instead asked Oliver to take a pay cut. He resigned in 1935.

But in 1938 after two other organists quit in succession, the trustees and the congregation raised \$18,000 for organ repairs. Casavant Freres, who still have the maintenance contract, conducted a major refit completely rebuilding the instrument and replacing or installing at least half the current pipes. The existing case and display pipes were moved forward about two feet and a new console was built and moved from the wall to a place directly behind the organ. (The reeds were revoiced again in 1956.)

For many years, the Casavant Society sponsored young organists in concert at St. James United. Both Raymond Daveluy and Bernard Lagaçé had their Montreal debuts here and E. Power Biggs, Simon Preston, Fernando Germani and André Marchal all played recitals.

It is a mighty instrument used every Sunday in services and frequently in concerts. There is a regular summer recital series on Tuesdays at noon-hour – one on Canada Day in 2006 featured the North American premiere of a recently rediscovered long-lost piece by J. S. Bach. And for the last two years, St. James has also been the site of a weekend organ marathon in late February early March during “les nuits blanches” which ends at 3 a.m. Sunday

It will cost an estimated \$1 million to rebuild the organ again, work that the instrument urgently needs.

In 1936, the United Church of Canada ordained its first woman after Lydia Gruchy successfully persuaded the men of her church over a 13-year period serving multiple-point charges in rural Saskatchewan that she had been called by God to be a minister.

By way of comparison, the Unitarians and the Salvation Army (an offshoot of evangelical Methodism) had been ordaining women since the 19th century. But Canada’s Presbyterians only ordained their first woman minister in 1967 and this country’s Anglicans and Lutherans didn’t get around to it until 1976. Some churches still don’t ordain women.

It took another 11 years before Anne Graham became the first woman candidate for the ministry nominated from St. James in 1947. And the first ordained woman minister who was actually called to St. James was Rev. Nettie I. J. Wilson who served from 1955 to 1960.

The 1950’s and 60’s were a classic period for St. James.

Prominent speakers addressed large hushed crowds in public lectures.

Famed evangelist Billy Graham packed the sanctuary.

So did Eleanor Roosevelt, who spoke at a packed meeting at St. James sponsored by the United Nations Association on May 19th, 1955 and wrote in her newspaper column: "People even sat on the steps and in the aisles."

Jane Goodall talked about her work with chimpanzees there, illustrating her speech with film shown on the church's large movie screen hanging in front of the organ pipes. Montreal artist Suzanne Blouin remembers Ms Goodall opening her presentation by barking like a chimpanzee.

Controversial psychiatrist R.D. Laing also spoke at St. James.

And in 1969, an international meeting on world peace in the sanctuary attended by Salvador Allende among others and sponsored in part by the Canadian communist party erupted into chaos after the Black Panther's delegation took over the church. They were upset because their leader Bobby Seale had not been invited to attend and nobody was able to leave until money was raised to fly him to Montreal from Chicago.

In 1964, the church membership stood at 755. There were programs for young adults and seniors supervised by Lydia McCullough, St. James' last deaconess who served from 1961 to 1985. She revived the St. James Players, an amateur theatre group that performed in the church hall and took its productions of plays on religious themes out to the suburbs. (The church Sunday School would pillage the props room for costumes for the Christmas pageant.)

Ms McCullough also established a number of new partnerships with other downtown churches and agencies. St. James, for example, contributed to Saint Michael's Mission which served meals to the indigent in the basement of St. John the Evangelist Anglican Church behind the new Place-des-Arts.

The church young people cleaned out a space formerly used as a storage space for coal and turned it into a café called The Coal Bin where concerts and poetry readings were held for anyone who dropped in.

People from the church worked with the elderly through "the Yellow Door" and participated in the development of community housing in Milton Park.

St. James has always been part of the world around it. A Honey Dew restaurant in the church's commercial buildings at the corner of St. Catherine St. and City Councillors became the scene of one of Quebec's first language demonstrations in the early 1960's.

Poet and journalist Gérald Godin and genial Gazette columnist Nick Auf der Mauer were among those who staged a sit-in there to back demands for bilingual signs and services. (Signs and service at the Honeydew were in English only.) Years later in the late 1970's when Godin was a member of the Parti Québécois government, he met Auf der Mauer who had become an independent city councillor and asked why he didn't join the PQ. Auf der Mauer, who was never a member of St. James, replied dryly that he was still arguing for bilingual signs. The PQ was working for French-only signs at the time.

In the 1970's, keeping its place as a centre for public discourse after her husband was killed, Coretta Scott King addressed a large gathering of United Church Women at the church.

By then however, English-speaking people were leaving Montreal in massive numbers and St. James membership, already affected by a more general decline in traditional church attendance, plummeted. In 1975, the congregation agreed to accept proposals for redevelopment.

In 1977 A.E. Lepage, the church's real estate agent, applied to the city for a demolition permit. In September of that year, the church was advised that approval of the application would be delayed for a year. And in March 1978, the year the church celebrated its 175th anniversary, Denis Vaugeois, Quebec Minister of Cultural Affairs, notified the church of his intention to declare the church a cultural asset or "bien culturelle" and asked for a response.

Rev. Victor Fiddes replied that the church was too large and too expensive for the congregation. It required immediate repairs that would cost \$600,000 which the church could not pay. And he said there was an offer to buy the church and the property that would bring the congregation \$5 million and another \$300,000 per year in income. The government refused to approve the church's request for demolition and promised to help the congregation preserve the building.

Rev. Fiddes said later that was the point of the whole exercise. And afterwards, thanks in part to the efforts of Montreal architect and historian Jean-Claude Marsan, the church was also declared a National Historic Site of Canada.

While this was going on, Lydia McCullough was considering new projects for outreach. Among the many operations staffed by St. James' volunteers, the church operated a food bank which was fully supported by a thrift shop selling used clothes and collectibles..

With the active involvement of Rev. Paul Crittenden, the dynamic young minister at the time, one of the last things Ms McCullough did at St. James before she died, was to have the church hire social worker Lucia Kowaluk as a consultant to recommend how to deal with the many homeless people, a good number of them with obvious psychiatric issues, who came to the church seeking help.

Kowaluk recommended that the church create a day centre for itinerants and the St. James Centre opened on the church's third floor under her direction in 1985. Over the years it has become a major independent outreach partner of St. James, working with downtown street people and others suffering from psychiatric and related problems.

It offers counselling, food and daytime shelter to more than 250 people. Its government grants contribute significant rental income to the church.

Former employees established a separate organization called Chambreclerc that acquired three former rooming houses in the neighbourhood and converted them to supervised low-cost housing for about 70 people.

The Centre's creative art program with support from volunteer artists in Montreal has gained widespread recognition for helping many members find homes and many of the artists who participate now have their own collectors. A poetry program published a book that sold out at downtown bookstores. And other creative projects are constantly bubbling up.

Volunteers from the Concordia University School of Fine Arts and interns from the McGill and Dawson College schools of social work and various European universities participate in the Centre under the direction of a young, dedicated and highly professional staff. The Centre cooperates with other agencies like the YMCA. And other Montreal churches contribute to the work financially. When a Drop-In member dies, a memorial service is held in the church's small Victorian chapel.

It has established a standard for outreach and partnership and now is an independent organization with its own charitable number.

In the late 1990's church attendance started to grow again.

In 1996, about 60 to 70 people including the choir, would attend Sunday services. On Easter Sunday 2007, between 600 and 700 took part. On a normal Sunday in 2009, there are at least 125 people on the ground floor and 50 to 100 more go up to the balcony.

A number of factors contributed to this growth.

For one thing, the doors of the church remained open when other churches closed. Several other downtown churches were either demolished or converted into other uses. Some of the former members of those churches started coming to St. James.

People are starting to move back to the city core and some decided to attend our church. The United Church as a denomination is a little less judgmental than some others. Divorced people and same-sex couples are among the church's new members. And many play an active and dynamic role. People get involved.

Our music has been a major draw.

Veteran jazzman Charlie Biddle introduced the famous Montreal Jubilation Gospel Choir directed by Trevor Payne to St. James. That commercial choir has performed its annual Christmas concert there to full houses ever since. Many prominent gospel singers such as Sylvie des Groselliers launched their careers at St. James under Mr. Payne's direction and a new generation of Montrealers has come to appreciate the sanctuary's fine acoustics.

More recently, the remarkable Peoples' Gospel Choir of Montreal directed by Kim Sherwood became a musical partner of the church, performing in occasional concerts and frequent worship services. It won the Vibe award for the best gospel compact disc of the year in Canada, recorded during a concert in the sanctuary and performs tirelessly to perform and raise funds for those in need and celebrate the Lord's presence.

When Erskine and American United Church on Sherbooke Street closed, many of its congregation chose to join St. James. So did most of its choir and its music director Jean-Sébastien Allaire.

Mr. Allaire now is choral director at St. James and the singers he brought with him still perform together as a chamber choir. A modern chamber organ from Erskine is used regularly in worship.

The church's own regular 20-to-30-voice Sunday choir is a fine one. While anyone in the congregation with basic musical skills can join – the church offers free music reading lessons to choristers – section leaders who are generally music students or young professional musicians are paid a small amount as soloists and coaches. Over the years these have included such remarkable singers as Maureen Forrester and Karina Gauvin.

Philip Crozier, the longest-serving director of music in the history of the church (he started at St. James in 1986, a year after he arrived in Canada from England), has played organ duets all over the world with his wife Sylvie Poirier. As a soloist, he performed in Cologne Cathedral in 2009 for about 3,000 people. He has his own students and many contemporary works have been written for him and his wife.

Mr. Crozier organizes a lunch-time recital series every summer Tuesday with a focus on the organ. Both the large and small instruments are played at these concerts.

Since 2008, another Tuesday lunch-hour concert series has been organized by a dynamic group of young musicians based at McGill University called Chamber Music Without Borders. They initially came to the building to perform for Drop-In members.

And the Montreal Chamber Music Festival under the artistic direction of Denis Brott now takes place at St. James

A new partnership began when the Montreal City Mission, by this time an agency of the United Church, moved to Saint James in 2005. It runs a refugee program from the church

with its own radio-show -- Ici Radio-Refuge on Radio-Centre-Ville -- and has its own housing in the downtown core for a small number of refugee claimants.

The Mission also has a legal aid clinic at the church – the Just Solutions program – that it administers with the help of McGill University, plus Camp Cosmos, a summer day camp for inner-city children that operates out of the church hall.

And jointly with St. James, the Mission sponsors an inter-faith, multi-lingual children's music program and choir, the EveryKid Choir that sings with enthusiasm all over the city. Chamber Music Without Borders does workshops with them and members and friends of the congregation have donated instruments and give music lessons.

The Mission has also brought some new partners to St. James. Its staff works with the McGill University Middle-East Peace Project and, with the church, operates a collective kitchen with Latin American immigrants in the church kitchen..

In many ways, the Mission has begun to act as a catalyst for the way the church deals with the world, analysing the Gospel message of love and hospitality and through dialogue and participation eliciting an often innovative response.

Another catalyst began in May 2009 when a national ministry of the United Church – UMiF or the Unit of Ministries in French -- moved into St. James.

Its mandate is to communicate in French the specific message of the United Church; to support ministries in French with appropriate resources; to promote the development of new pastoral charge in French and the birth of French groups in English speaking communities; to promote Ministries in French and their work within the United Church; and to increase the visibility of the French-speaking component of the United Church in our society.

And meanwhile the daily work of the church – worship and celebration, prayer and study and pastoral outreach and care -- continues.

Rev. Arlen Bonnar, the current pastor of the church, deserves much of the credit for the church's renewal. He is a former Protestant chaplain at the palliative care ward of the Royal Victoria Hospital and the AIDS clinic at the Montreal General Hospital who at one time was executive director of the City Mission after serving as minister of a two-point charge in the Eastern Townships.

When he was called to St. James in 2000, he told the congregation that he didn't want to be the curator of a museum and said that it is not in the tradition of the United Church of Canada to hide behind walls in the middle of a city.

He helped put together the partnership with Montreal business people and Quebec's Religious Heritage Foundation in the St. James Development Corporation that led to the

demolition of the front buildings and the restoration of the church façade by architects Werleman, Guy, MacMahon and general contractor L. M. Sauve Ltd.

And the church's point man on the project – trustee Allen Fuller who is a private contractor and former airline executive – has put in thousands of hours of his own time representing the church interests in the delicate balancing act required for this complex project. When the new St. James Square was opened in September 2008 and restored façade was celebrated, both men received a great deal of well-deserved acclaim.

St. James has repeatedly been a centre for inter-faith worship.

There were special ceremonies in the presence of Jewish and Moslem clergy, for example, when Montreal and Quebec held their official service to mark the destruction of New York's World Trade Centre in 2001 and in 2006 when Dawson College held its memorial service for the tragic shooting there.

And the women of the church under the leadership of the Montreal City Mission mark the anniversary of the killings at the École Polytechnique every year on December Sixth with an inter-faith ceremony.

Rev. Bonner has also tried to make St. James more inclusive and less judgemental. The United Church has offered Christian marriage to divorced people for decades. Several same-sex couples have been married at St. James in the last few years.

In May 2006, St. James was packed to the back row of the balcony when the Montreal and Ottawa Conference of the United Church celebrated the ordination of eight new ministers – four men and four women, all of them married and seven of them parents. In May 2007, the United Church organized a national Urban Ministries Leadership Conference in Montreal with a special role for St. James.

Rev. Bonner has literally opened the doors of the church to the city.

Between July First 2006 and December 31st 2009, about 400,000 visitors streamed into the church on weekdays and after services, attracted by its renewed visibility.

Most are curious about a relatively unknown part of Quebec's religious past. Some find something else, a spiritual space in the chaotic downtown core that resonates with more than a century of prayer and praise and offers a place of peace.

In the east tower, there is a very special stained glass window.

When the commercial buildings were demolished in front of the church, about 20 windows in the front wall and towers were discovered along with sculptures, woodwork and a couple of doors.

This particular window had been largely destroyed. Most of the glass had been discarded to make a doorway from the church into the offices on the second floor. Montreal artists were invited to submit designs that would blend with what was left of the old window and mark the current 21st-century congregation's place in the continuing heritage of St. James.

The winning design by Studio de Verre in Old Montreal shows rising flames matching the colours of the 19th century glass in the neo-Gothic tracery at the top.

Flames are a historic Christian symbol of the Holy Spirit and of Pentecost, the birthday of the church. It was unveiled in September 13th 2006 when the church square was officially opened.

Ali Atogul, the artist who designed it, is an instructor at the Studio and a Moslem immigrant to Montreal from Istanbul, a city that has been a centre for stained glass throughout the Middle East since the Byzantine Empire was founded 1500 years ago.

He said he was inspired to make a window for our Christian church by the Jewish sacred text about Moses and the burning bush, a story that is common to all three religions.

We light it at night to show passers-by on St Catherine Street that we have been here, lit by the Holy Spirit for more than 200 years.

The statement of faith of the United Church says: "We are not alone, we live in God's world.

"We believe in God who has created and is creating, Who has come in Jesus, the Word made flesh, to reconcile and make new, Who works in us and others by the Spirit.

"We trust in God.

"We are called to be the Church, to celebrate God's presence, to live with respect in Creation, to love and serve others, to seek justice and resist evil, to proclaim Jesus crucified and risen, our judge and our hope.

"In life, in death, in life beyond death, God is with us.

"We are not alone."

For more than 200 years, our church has been a vital part of Montreal's religious and community life as its members tried to live out the values expressed by this creed.

St. James is not a building preservation society although its people love the place. The roof leaks. There are cracks in the wall and the plaster and paint in the sanctuary is falling down. The organ occasionally makes strange sounds and must be totally rebuilt. The heating, ventilation and electric wiring have to be redone.

The church must raise funds for all of these projects and more while maintaining a central spiritual role in the lives and hearts of its people and those in the city around it.

But in a spirit of joyful accommodation, Mr. Atogul has helped St. James announce in a not unsubtle way that we are alive and well and back on the street!

And we are not alone.

Rob Bull is a long-time newsman and an elder of St. James United Church. He is Secretary of the church's Official Board and also chairs the board of directors of the St. James Drop-In Centre

BULL, Rob (2009), « Le patrimoine vivant de l'église unie Saint-James, dans Solange Lefebvre (dir.),
Le patrimoine religieux du Québec, éducation et transmission du sens, Québec : Les presses de l'université Laval, p. 317-335