



The Cathedral Church of St. George

270 King St. E. at Johnson St.
P.O. Box 475, Kingston, Ont. K7L 4W5
Telephone: 613-548-4617
www.StGeorgesCathedral.ca

November 12, 2025

To my Sisters and Brothers in Christ
The People of St George's Cathedral

When I first wrote to you regarding Lunch by George it was, in the light of its unexpected two month closure earlier this year, to reflect on the challenges faced by a feeding programme in downtown Kingston in today's world. In our ongoing conversations with Outreach St George Kingston (OSGK) - the independent body which manages and runs the feeding programme from the Cathedral - and in our open community discussion forums attended by members of the Cathedral leadership and congregation, past and present OSGK board members and volunteers, and even members of the community served by the feeding programme, we identified some important realities:

The needs in the City of Kingston have become more complex since the Cathedral began this programme forty years ago. Part of that complexity is stress related - for clients and volunteers both. Part of that complexity is economic. And part of that complexity is, increasingly, drug related. Incidents of threat, intimidation, and violence have increased in recent years to dangerous levels - amongst those living unhoused; toward those working and volunteering at OSGK and similar outreach programmes across Kingston; and toward the staff and visitors at the Cathedral. That reality, together with the known incidents of onsite drug dealing and drug use before Lunch by George's closure earlier this year, and the serious contamination of our washrooms necessitating professional cleaning, required us to look again at what it means to run safe and responsible programming from the Cathedral.

In discussion with OSGK it was clearly established that neither the Cathedral nor OSGK had the resources to provide the fulltime security that a full service, in house, food programme would responsibly require. It was also clear that both OSGK and the Cathedral remained committed to serving the needs in our community that we had originally established Lunch by George to meet. And we therefore, amongst other things, agreed the following:

That Lunch by George would reopen - but offering a reduced 'take-out' only service; and that its clients would remain outside of the Cathedral buildings. OSGK would take responsibility for managing their client's behaviour, ensuring that access to the Cathedral would remain unhindered and safe; that queues outside would be orderly; that smoking bylaws would be respected; that litter from take out containers would be cleared; and that people would not congregate beyond OSGK's operating times. The Cathedral reduced OSGK's rent to one dollar per annum to free up OSGK resources for this undertaking. In order to give both

OSGK and the Cathedral an opportunity to review how effective these changes would be, it was agreed that this newly signed license agreement would automatically terminate next summer, unless extended by both parties - or unless either party chose to give reasonable notice of four months.

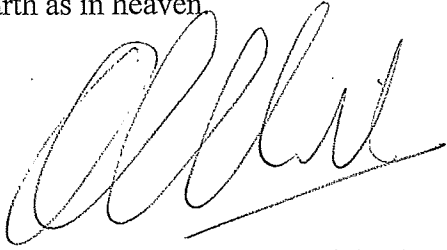
In the months since Lunch by George resumed it has sadly become clear that these steps are not going to be enough. Threat and intimidation of Cathedral staff and visitors continue. Stress levels amongst staff remain high. OSGK has outsourced its management of their clients' behaviour to an off-site third party, so that incidents are managed reactively rather than proactively, and often delayed. While this may help de-escalate protracted incidents, it does not create the safe environment which we are legally and morally bound to ensure - for staff, for visitors, or for clients of programmes operating at the Cathedral. OSGK's hours of access have already needed extending well beyond the terms of this new agreement in order to allow their reduced staff complement the extra preparation and cleanup time they require, impacting both our own staff operations and our potential to use the hall for other ministry through the day. In conversation with the board of OSGK it has been made clear that none of these dynamics are likely to change, as OSGK has the capacity only to hire staff and security on a part time basis for their half day service - making those positions extremely hard to fill.

Consequently, and in order to give OSGK the maximum time possible to explore its future options, the Wardens of the Cathedral, acting with my full support, have now informed the board of OSGK that they will not be renewing their license to operate at the Cathedral beyond June 2026.

This is a complicated decision to process. On the one hand, it is a thing to celebrate that a humble food programme, originally intended simply to provide meals over the summer while other established programmes in Kingston took a break, could grow into a forty year labour of love, serving two hundred meals a day, so that people could find breakfast, and lunch, and have food to take away, at a time when growing numbers of people are struggling. The Cathedral owes a debt of thanks to its countless members over the years who volunteered to prepare meals, serve them, keep the kitchen in good order, and eventually establish and serve on the board of OSGK as it became independent.

On the other hand, it is a moment for sombre reflection that we stand, as a society, at a critical juncture. If even a forty year programme is not robust enough to safely and responsibly manage, on its own, the challenges of operating in today's environment then we, as a society, need to find better collective solutions to the social problems we share. If the complexities of today's world truly mean that the age of small projects is behind us, then it is the age of collaborative projects that must lie before us. Our Cathedral must, and does, remain committed to serving those most in need in our greater community. And so, in the months ahead, we will offer OSGK what support we can while they explore their options to relocate, or merge, or embrace some new alternative. We will also actively be in conversation with other established programmes in Kingston to explore how we may support or help their work. We will also engage in conversation with the city over the need for local government resources to support private outreach initiatives, including church based initiatives for public good, so that local communities can bear the burden together for the work that some undertake on behalf of others.

If the ending of a forty year programme at the Cathedral is truly a 'canary in the coal mine' moment for the viability of private community-based outreach programmes in today's complex world, then my prayer is that it will also be the catalyst for honest conversation around, and genuine commitment to, building the comprehensive systems that must replace them. Let us offer this prayer for one another, for the people of Kingston, for the clients and volunteers of Lunch by George, and for the ever more full realisation of God's Kingdom on earth as in heaven

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Douglas Michael', written in a cursive style.

The Very Rev'd Douglas Michael
Dean of Ontario