

Imperial to International

A History of St John's Cathedral, Hong Kong

Stuart Wolfendale

*With a Foreword by Paul Kwong,
Archbishop of the Hong Kong Sheng Kung Hui*



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Introduction

Up to this point, the Cathedral Church of St John the Evangelist has been served in print by a hardback handbook, *The Story of St John's Cathedral*, published by FormAsia and briskly written by journalist Stephen Vines, and by a softback, *St John's Cathedral Hong Kong: A Short History and Guide*, by Doreen King. Vines writes a concise account of the historical milestones, and King's particular contribution is an informed and expert summary of the fabric and furnishings upon which this book has gratefully drawn. *Imperial to International* moves on from both of them.

Any great and antique place of Christian worship in Asia which has survived and continues to breathe its faith is a phenomenon which deserves to be recorded. Anglican cathedrals in Asia are particularly rare phenomena which merit close attention. St John's in Hong Kong commands the particular attention which this book gives it, not just for its near pristine Victorian Gothic form set in a twenty-first-century Chinese city but for its testimony to the survival of organised Christian worship in Hong Kong from an era which we can barely recognise into an era we hardly dare make prediction for. This book looks not only at its architecture but at the development of its status, its liturgy, its ministry and charity, its social impact and, above all, the souls who populated it through its first one hundred and fifty years.

In September 2009, the Most Reverend Dr. Paul Kwong, Archbishop of the Hong Kong Sheng Kung Hui, whose seat St John's is, and then Dean the Very Reverend Andrew Chan asked me to write a thoroughgoing story of the church. Initially the dean conjured with the idea of an 'extended King'. The archbishop took it further and into hardback. He saw a spiritual and political history as well as one of structure and contents.

Archbishop Kwong added that he would like it to be 'readable' too. He was not looking for a work of microscopic academic propriety which set off ruthlessly along donnish tangents and performed feats of bar-bending to bring them back to the plot. He wanted people to put the book down and look forward to picking it up again. I have regarded this as one of the most important charges of my commission.

The commission was a generous one. It allowed the writer his own interpretation of events, which steers away from excessive idealism or hagiography towards a more realistic account. A consequence is that my views expressed are not necessarily those of the cathedral or of the Hong Kong Sheng Kung Hui. This book does not pretend to be an utterly complete history. It is a chronological medley of the important strains that ran through the life of St John's. It is not split into topic areas, which would have reduced it to a collection of essays and a great deal of repetition. It is a story during which, for certain topics, the narrative slows a bit, harks back and looks forward before resuming its pace. It remains, above all, a narrative.

As a story, there are parts which are missing. Records have vanished or were never properly kept in the first place. In a Christian congregation in which there was familiarity and trust, matters more to do with mission and spirit and less with law and cash were handled by word of mouth or unofficial jottings. The Japanese Occupation accounts for some of the shortfall and for the fact that, after the economic devastations of their stay in Hong Kong, paper of any sort became attractive as cooking fuel. Over a century and a half, there will have been remarkable instances of enterprise, enmity and charity of which we will know nothing.

There are also tantalising and quite unpredictable clues to structure and behaviour at the cathedral that can only be found in references in other subject areas. An aside remark in Church Missionary Society (CMS) correspondence or between church schoolteachers or government servants or Freemasons can throw a thin but fascinating beam on something that may have been going on in St John's. The history of the cathedral is a subject about which there will always be something new to be found. I am aware, for example, that the 'disestablishment' of the bishopric from 1874 and the Second World War and its immediate aftermath are periods on which more detail may exist but distantly and in the shade.

This book is not an exposure of what was previously unknown. It is an attempt to gather together and put into order material which has

already been uncovered to some degree and from sources which are already familiar to many.

The Hong Kong Public Records Office (PRO), relocated in a Kwun Tong public housing estate to test the ardour of true scholars, is where all the official records of St John's Cathedral are kept up to 1965. These include the minutes of trustees meetings and their correspondence, minutes of some committees and guilds, an uneven spread of birth, marriage and death registers, *Church Notes* magazine and a few references to chapels of ease. Diocesan records at the PRO include the bishops' 'scrapbooks'—interesting if indeed scrappy correspondences and diary entries of bishops up to and including Gilbert Baker.

These records seem to have been a primary source for G. B. Endacott and D. E. She's *The Diocese of Victoria, Hong Kong: A Hundred Years of Church History, 1849–1949*. This work includes a helpful narrative account of the major constitutional events in the cathedral's life up to the Second World War. The records also informed Colonel R. F. Johnston, a Cathedral Council member who typed up a manuscript history of St John's in 1937, when the volumes were still in the church. This document was uncovered in the cathedral's own record office along with more recent official records.

Whereas the PRO records are open to the public with the permission of the Dean of St John's, the more recent records, dating from 1963, are kept in the cathedral office and can only be viewed by appointment. These include all council minutes and Annual Church Meeting reports, the latter being published in *St John's Review*. Within this more contemporary material are folded occasional fading gems of correspondence or memoranda from earlier decades which await rearrangement. It was from one such paper, a letter to Bishop Hall, pressed between dull accounts folders, that I learned that Dean Wilson, later the legendary wartime Bishop of Singapore, was less than universally liked among his parishioners.

There are more documents of interest in a series of basement rooms in Bishop's House, Lower Albert Road. A wealth of diocesan material has collected there over the years, initially, perhaps, because the occupying Japanese and the foragers who came after them did not intrude there, and pre-war documents were allowed to survive. This space is a prime example of where material telling the history of the diocese in other parts may well come to have a bearing on St John's. Its cataloguing was not quite in time for this book.

The fascinating and unimaginably painstaking card index of local people compiled by Carl T. Smith, historian of Hong Kong Christianity, and kept in the misnamed Central Public Library in Causeway Bay, often helped to flesh out names penned in the well-drilled Victorian handwriting of the minute books. Attendances at trustees meetings were recorded using only initials for Christian names. The minutes themselves followed the tradition of the passive voice and collectivity in decisions. Many of those listed left no trace of an opinion, let alone an identity, and could disappear either to 'home' or the graveyard without even getting onto the jury list either. In many cases, Carl Smith's monitoring of the courts and the obituaries gives these early church stalwarts a skein of identity.

The newspapers were available too at the Hong Kong University Libraries along with Colonial Records Office documents. The latter have already been well mined to discover the details of the cathedral's construction and financing and the colonial government's involvement. I have simply attempted to put the accounts in order and sieve the sensible from the implausible.

Newspapers I have resorted to for reportage on events that took place in and around St John's which the cathedral itself has left no record of. Sometimes the press could not be bothered with it, or an edition has been lost. I have included accounts of church services where they are particularly significant, moving or unusual and not just because references exist; otherwise, the book would become a catalogue of orders of service.

Structure and fabric receives attention where it matters, but this is not a handbook of architectural minutia which goes into detail over every roof repair and exterior wash. Nor does it trace the replacement of every altar frontal. That would not be the sort of book you would want to pick up again.

Attention has been paid to the people, long forgotten, who wore out the rattan in the rosewood pews and whose voices were absorbed by the silence of the stone and brick. Many hours have been spent with *Church Notes* and its successor, *St John's Review*, as well as electronic copies of *The Outpost*, the magazine of the Victoria Diocesan Association, trying to hear these people. The church itself is an impressive building in its quality, simplicity and neatness of design, but the overarching fascination to it is how its congregations of foreigners survived and even flourished to support it in this far-from-Christian land.

The story is not an entirely comfortable one to tell. The extraordinary geographical position which the newly founded church was placed in 1849 created a dichotomy in its purpose which was never completely resolved. It began as a colonial parish church for Hong Kong's expatriate British. Within a year, it also became the seat of a diocesan bishop with a missionary purpose for the whole of China. St John's could not opt to move between the roles when it suited it. They existed as 'parallel universes', as one dean described it, sometimes touching, even overlapping, but most often, keeping a distance.

As a colonial cathedral playing the role of imperial parish, St John's was always very grand and civic in its function. It was the state church of the colony. All the events of empire were celebrated there, and the national services held in the churches of London were duplicated as best they could be. The cathedral would be packed with Westerners and Chinese, and services in both languages might take place during the great day. Yet on an ordinary Sunday, for the first hundred years of its life at least, rarely was a Chinese to be seen at matins, and services would be dutifully, if sometimes thinly, attended by the white administrators and merchants of the colonial establishment to whom responsibility for St John's survival ultimately fell.

Their priorities and those of the missionary bishops, who either fancied the cathedral might do more towards China mission or put it at the back of their minds, were hard to reconcile. At the very least, St John's congregation believed the bishop should be more often at home as a bishop of Hong Kong. The bishops themselves—all CMS men up to the time of R. O. Hall—stated quite bluntly that their main responsibility was to spread the Word in China. This led to the existence of two Anglican churches in China, the English and the Chinese, each with its own structure. Even when China was removed from the equation in 1950, the distinction lived on within the Hong Kong rump until 1974.

A truth at once uncomfortable but honest to arrive at is that St John's Cathedral was never effectively a diocesan cathedral. It was the 'cathedral', the seat of the city's bishop, but it was rarely a focus or a resource for the parishes within that diocese. It was, however, a very effective civic church, a focus of thanksgiving or remembrance for the whole city, even as the leading lights within that city shifted from Western to Chinese faces and the faiths of the establishment became less and less often Christian.

There were moments when the parallel universes overlapped, and they were inspiring. Examples are the ordination of Lo Sam Yuen, the first Chinese to be made a deacon in Hong Kong, and the consecration of Bishop Mok Shao Tsang in 1935, prior to him becoming Bishop of Canton.

Yet, for the most part, the order of the day was linguistic and racial distinction, not of an antipathetic sort but one easily resorted to by two cultures which were happy to view themselves as mutually exclusive. Up to 1941, at least, St John's was, for the most part, a church of the British and their sympathisers. The inevitable detachment of that once exclusive, colonial congregation from the mission work of its bishops among the Chinese has left a legacy in the organic relationship between the cathedral and the Chinese parishes, even though the diocesan pattern and the constitution of St John's have altered beyond recognition.

On the face of it, it would seem difficult to write a sympathetic history of a Christian organisation which operated in a world of colonial exclusivity. Yet writing history is neither about delving for sentiment nor arriving at judgement. That, as sensible Christians know, lies elsewhere. There is no purpose in bringing the haughty libertarianism of the twenty-first century to bear upon men and women who believed in all sincerity that they were trying to live their very best by the precepts of God, king and country.

I have tried to write about St John's in the light of the social conditioning by which the cathedral's succeeding generations lived. When I describe certain situations in which behaviour has been somewhat archaic, I hope I will be excused if my tongue is sticking through my cheek a little. Otherwise, I have seen people of a different age going about God's business with a period purpose and admire them for it.

If I have felt any annoyances at the material, it has been with some expatriate church people of the more immediate past who persisted in a suburban, Little Englander parochialism which kept China at bay as effectively as a 'members only' recreation club. One eminent historian in Hong Kong told me that he only liked to write about people who are 'good 'n' dead'. In the case of the St John's story, I could not afford myself that luxury. For those who I refer to who are good 'n' living and don't like what they read, may they forgive me as they are commanded.

The narrative proper stops around 1998. That is the point by which the last significant structural alteration within the cathedral

compound was completed. Most of the current outreach ministries had been set up. All the present daughter churches had been established. The clergy structure and the council and committee structures were all very much what we have in 2011. At the diocesan level, the Province of the Hong Kong Sheng Kung Hui had just been created. The remains of the colonial period were about to end.

The diocese had its first Chinese bishop. The cathedral was yet to see Andrew Chan as its first dean. Yet, by this point, it is already moving towards a multinational purpose which will reinforce its civic importance to Hong Kong as an international finance centre and, in a sense, compensate for the historical imbalances which prevented it from being a purely diocesan centre.

Chapter 9

Into the 'Chinese Century'

The 1954 building, the Tebbut Wing, is the most recent structural addition to St John's but far from the last word on the compound's north-west corner. To the contrary, the council discussed the site's future in 2011, and a strong possibility was that Dean Foster's wish may be granted and the whole structure razed as part of an altogether more ambitious project. From that last point of the church's alteration, as colonial authority waned in favour of irresistible Chinese sovereignty, history shunts into the back of current affairs. The cathedral may still have been the spiritual refuge for economic transients and 'short-timers', but Hong Kong has developed new generations of 'belongers'. Many who worshipped and worked at St John's twenty years ago do so still. There are still living and competing memories of events.

The handover to Chinese rule in 1997 was a smooth passage for Christian denominations in Hong Kong. The newly formed Province of the Sheng Kung Hui treats the Mainland authorities with a certain deftness and achieves cooperative results. Representatives of the State Council's Bureau of Religious Affairs attended the installation of Paul Kwong as Bishop of Hong Kong Island on 15 January 2007. They continued attendances at ceremonies involving church leaders. At the consecration of the former Dean of St John's, Andrew Chan, as a bishop on 25 March 2012, there was a pew full of Mainland officials, including members of the Central Government Liaison Office, representatives of the Bureau of Religious Affairs and the Chinese Communist Party in Beijing. Also present were sixteen guests from the China Christian Council in Shanghai and Guangdong.

The cathedral felt barely a breeze from the handover. There was the briefest of conversations over the future of the fabled freehold and whether this might have to be converted to a lease with the new

government. That would have been unaffordable for the Church and probably have caused its departure from the site, which was a result no one sought. In any event, the covenant under which the land was used had so many restrictions that a change in status did not become an issue.

The Church in Hong Kong did some nation-building of its own in harmony with the handover. The anomaly created by Hong Kong's withdrawal from the Chung Hua Sheng Kung Hui in 1951 was faced up to as the end of British rule neared. The wandering Diocese of Hong Kong decided to anchor itself as a province at a synodical meeting in December 1991.

The options before it were independence or joining up with Sabah, Taiwan and Singapore in a new joint province. Interestingly, most delegates were comfortable with the *status quo*, but they were persuaded by Bishop Peter Kwong that coming political change compelled the Church to keep pace. The appeal of a union with the other dioceses was a stimulus to internationalism and grew from the sense that Hong Kong was too small to go it alone and that the diocese lacked the experience and the time to put something together for itself.

On the other hand, there was little contact with the other dioceses, and to create it and maintain it would be expensive. The dioceses did not have much in common with one another, and the Hong Kong Diocese's independence and traditions would be compromised. This faintly chauvinistic reasoning was partly a cover for a political reality. The Anglican Church in a Hong Kong newly regained by the motherland should not appear, from the point of view of secular Chinese authority, to be under instruction from outside sovereignties. That reasoning won the day. Peter Kwong was to be installed as first Archbishop of the Hong Kong Sheng Kung Hui in 1998. This was achieved in the face of a scepticism on the part of Canterbury as strong as opposition from any other quarter. After a fact-finding visit to Hong Kong, which opened the eyes of the Anglican Consultative Council to the realities on the ground, the communion's bureaucracy was won over.

George Carey, Archbishop of Canterbury, had visited Hong Kong in September 1994, on his way to China, and preached in the cathedral on missionary faith in a pluralistic world. For his pains, he attracted vigorous criticism in an editorial in the *Eastern Express*. Undeterred, he came back for the inauguration of the new province and the enthronement of Peter Kwong on All Saints' Day 1998. This was

one great ceremony that St John's stood silent for. So great were the numbers expected that it was held in the Convention and Exhibition Centre in Wan Chai. The starkly multipurpose hall, built blind to senses of occasion, was decorated by ecclesiastical motifs and back-lit by *faux* stained glass windows. The impression of a Hollywood lot was redeemed by the joy over what was being achieved.

Following his retirement in January 2007, the vindicated Peter Kwong became Archbishop *Emeritus*. Peter Kwong can be regarded as the principal architect of the Hong Kong Anglican Church's survival into the Chinese century. From 1984 to 1990, as Bishop of Hong Kong and Macao, he worked tirelessly as a member of the Basic Law Drafting Committee. He did a great deal to assure Hong Kong's religious freedoms, not least by making close connections with the Religious Affairs Bureau of the State Council of the PRC. He also forged closer and more forward-looking relationships with the leaders of the Chinese Christian Three-Self Patriotic Movement and the China Christian Council, the institutional embodiment of non-Roman Christianity in the Chinese mainland. He became especially close to Bishop K. H. Ting (Ding Guangxun), the last Sheng Kung Hui Bishop in China, who was then head of both bodies.

The cathedral's part in this movement to a province was not insignificant but on the sidelines nonetheless. The meetings from 1 to 5 December 1991, which set the scene, were held in the Li Hall, a convenience which underscored the symbolism and physical centrality of St John's. According to the former Dean, Chris Phillips, 'there was a great deal of goodwill towards the Sheng Kung Hui and a real desire to be part of the diocese. There were, however, issues involved in the relationship . . . It was far easier to let the "parallel universes" continue so long as relations were amicable.'

The expressed wish on the part of the clergy and leading laypeople to come closer to the newly forming province was sincere. At the Cathedral Council meeting on 8 January 1998, members were urged to attend a scheduled talk by the bishop on the new province. At the June meeting that year, the dean spoke of the importance of attendance at council meetings in the year ahead, because of issues that would affect St John's status and its place in the province. These issues did not arise, at least not in the council.

By the September meeting, a consultation document on the province 'In Christ We Move Forward' had been issued. The English-speaking churches had what appeared to be a small role. St John's

set up a discussion group including the dean, Chaplain Peter Yeats, and council members Timon Shum, Justin Ko and Cindee Lee. On 14 October 1998, the council members of all three English parishes came together to air their views to the provincial secretary, the Reverend Paul Tong. At the council 'Away day' in September the following year, Dean Phillips still lamented the little involvement that St John's was having with the new Hong Kong Island Diocese. More must be done, he said, to 'be taken seriously' and get involved with the province's five-year plan.

Archbishop *Emeritus* Peter Kong, in conversation in April 2012, recalled that secular and lay committees set up to study the future and the choice of membership was based on suitability not representation. Any perceived exclusion of the English-speaking churches was not deliberate. He pointed out that it had been the habit of history before that time for both language sides of the church in Hong Kong to overlook each other.

Through goodwill and logic there was an attempt to integrate the cathedral physically into the new province, but for much the same reasons as secular government left the freehold alone, it did not get anywhere. The question of making a change of ownership from the trustees to the province was discussed in a council proposal in October 1995. This would involve relinquishing the freehold and making a re-grant by the state which would then have involved \$170,000 a year in rates. Simply handing over the freehold was not an option. A proposal that the cathedral should issue a declaration that it held the freehold for the bishop and the province was considered well meaning but not meaningful. An article by Rowan Callick on the province in the 1998 spring edition of the *Review*¹ patiently outlined the circumstances. The Hong Kong Sheng Kung Hui had separate legal status from the English-speaking churches. The Hong Kong Anglican Church had not been a part of the Church of England since 1912, whereas the English churches were firmly established under the Church of England Trust Ordinance, and all their properties were held thereunder. Fraternal gifting or even gestures were impossible outside some profound and sensitive alterations. An extraordinary meeting of the trustees in February 1997 put the cap on it. Advised by the Diocesan Chancellor, Moses Cheng, it was agreed that there should be no substantive change in method of governance and therefore no change to freehold.

The parallel churches set themselves for a slow convergence in the appointment of the first Chinese dean. After Phillips left hastily in 2003, a move attributed to ill health through stress, Stephen Sidebotham was invited to return as an interregnum dean while bishop and council wrestled with what to do with the office. The Reverend Andrew Chan Au Ming, the provincial secretary, previously a local parish priest trained at Ming Hua and Salisbury Theological Colleges, was invited to become dean. He was installed in May 2005.

The Reverend Ian Lam, who had been the first Chinese chaplain since George She, said quite plainly in the November 1978 issue of the *Review*, as he left office and went to study theology, that, 'on reflection, it is not essential to have a Chinese chaplain'. When the time came for a Chinese dean, it was certainly not for him to be a dean for the Chinese. Andrew Chan's application of himself across all of the cathedral's congregations was thorough and inspiring. His difference from his Western predecessors was in his management style, founded in faith, which led to a courageous, trusting willingness to let others develop by developing tasks for themselves.

It will take time to realise what Andrew Chan's impact really was on St John's, but it may turn out that his ethnic value was in relations between the cathedral and the province where, for once, and literally, the two could speak the same language. Chan was elected to succeed as Bishop of West Kowloon in 2012. To have a Chinese diocesan bishop who was once a dean is likely to make the cathedral and the Church in Kowloon, at the very least, more aware of each other.

'We are ever more international, ever less "colonial", ever less "Church of England",' said Dean Phillips in a report to a parish conference on 2 November 1991.² Andrew Chan would still have been noticing that fifteen years later, because this lessening process is a gradual one. In 1991, the Reverend Donald Reeves, Rector of St James's Piccadilly, visited and spoke about the challenges of the new decade. Inspired by him, the congregation conducted a parish survey which reported in October of that year.³

One of its subgroups, under Ms. Sally Stewart, surveyed the congregation over the summer months. Out of a sample of 417, 23 per cent were visitors, 26 per cent had lived in Hong Kong for three years or less and 15 per cent were complete newcomers. This was a very transient population.

Of the sample, 61 per cent had English as their mother tongue, 19 per cent claimed Tagalog and 14 per cent spoke Cantonese. Anglicans

or Episcopalians made up 65 per cent, and a striking 22 per cent were Roman Catholics, Filipinas who preferred to go to St John's and probably could not see much difference anyway. Ninety-five per cent of those who walked through the door were baptised and, of those who were not, most were Cantonese. Whatever the linguistic breakdown, the ethnic Chinese who attended were not so much 'locals' as 'repatriates'. They were emigrants from the 1950s onwards who had returned from overseas and found it either more familiar to worship in English or associate with expatriates. The one regular Cantonese service was and remains the 'anticipated' Communion on Saturday evening for those whose work does not allow them to attend on Sunday. The cathedral was chosen for this because of its central location. It was never meant to be the seedbed of a separate congregation, and originally, clergy from all around the province officiated in rotation to make the point. Even so, Archbishop Peter Kwong recalls that the more regular worshippers tried hard to make it so.

If Ms. Stewart's exercise had been repeated twenty years later, changes would have been noticed in the increase in the percentage of Filipinas, a reduction in English mother tongue and the appearance of Mandarin speakers from the Mainland. Denominational allegiances would be harder to speculate about. St John's liturgy 'liberalism', and standards of preaching and music mean that the 'open altar' policy has made the cathedral an attractive haven to an eclectic gathering of Christians.

From the debate in that province forming the 1991 synod, time was taken to say that St John's should 'continue its dual role as cathedral of the diocese and parish church to the international community'. As we have seen, this duality was a concept but not a practice. St John's role as a diocesan cathedral was symbolic more than working. Now that the former diocese was to be split into three smaller dioceses and there were no plans for cathedrals in East and West Kowloon, the role of St John's as the sole cathedral and purely for Hong Kong Island was drifting into anomaly.

Archbishop Peter Kwong recalls that the suggestion that St John's might become a provincial cathedral did not get very far. Expansion into that role threatened its international identity, among the clergy as much as the laity. A counter-idea took hold for a while. The Episcopalian Diocese in Los Angeles had sold its cathedral and resolved to do without one. Nothing in canon law stipulates that a diocese has to have a cathedral. At the Annual Church Meeting

of 1995,⁴ the dean noted that the status of the cathedral in a new province was still unsure and that maybe the Los Angeles-style should be adopted. Phillips was clearly uncomfortable with abandoning 'the dramatic statement' of a cathedral church in the middle of a city. Under this passing tension, 'St John's Cathedral Parish' was adopted as an official description, as though in readiness for the first half of that statement to fall away.

That did not happen. In a typically Anglican resort to patient passivity, the whole issue was left alone and affairs fell into place around it. East and West Kowloon eventually got cathedrals of their own. St John's is available to its diocese—its smallest in 163 years—as a gathering place without having to be particularly mothering. It is still a dramatic statement in the centre of the city and a parish church to repatriates as much as expatriates and foreigners of all Christian stripes. This is a twenty-first century distillation of what St John's was born with. The 'international community' of 1849 was small, precise and largely British. It was the ruling colonial community, and the cathedral was governed by some of its most influential members. Today, the British do not rule. Their numbers in the international community are diminishing.

Of the laity on the 2011 council, there were six Britons. Four members were Hong Kong Chinese, three were Americans, of whom one was ethnically Japanese and another Chinese, one was a Canadian, one a Malaysian Chinese, one a Singaporean, one a Filipino and two were Indians. Occupations were too diverse to summarise. They ranged from investment analysts and teachers to a wildlife preservation director and a pest controller. The Church Body of 1928 would have failed to comprehend it or would have believed that some advanced form of French Revolution had taken place among the colonies.

Another feature of the modern cathedral which would have surprised them in the 1920s is the prevalent misconception that St John's has a lot of money. Because it has endowments, and cash flows appear to be in seven figures, it is almost dismissed as a rich church. It is a common response from secular society keen to sniff hypocrisy and convinced that no religious institution should have any money at all, without bothering to consider how that might work. Like many cathedral churches, St John's struggles to maintain a financial position from which it can operate with a modest degree of confidence. Its assets might not be wiped out at a stroke exactly, but any

church which is custodian of an antique building, has a very varied and sometimes courageous scope to its ministry and relies so much on giving, then funds could well be eliminated by two wing beats from one of global finance's 'black swan events'.

Against this background, finances at St John's in the 1990s experienced what might be called 'business as usual'. Good management and good fortune rather more than compensated for mistakes, overstretching and ill luck. Where giving to the church was concerned, the 1994 stewardship campaign came close to its \$3 million target, even though three-quarters of the congregation made no pledges. In November 1995, Dr. Eric To, stalwart of St John's, gave \$820,000 in memory of his wife, a sad but illuminating example of how unforeseen donations came in as significant and repeated fillip to the cathedral's fortunes. When it came to giving its money away, there was usually a majority of St John's decision-makers doing that. At the January 1995 council meeting, all the Michaelmas Fair proceeds were voted to charity, and the old argument that they should go to cathedral funds was this time defeated. Thirty per cent went to Helpers for Domestic Helpers, which some were content to interpret as 'in house', 10 per cent then went each to the St James' Settlement, China Coast Community, the House of Shalom, Bethune House, the Children's Cancer Fund, the Society for Relief of Disabled Children and Heep Hong Handicapped Children.

Then, as usual, matters could suddenly go less than well. The October 1996 meeting of the council was being told of a deficit of \$673,000 and a decline in stewardship of \$340,000 in the first two quarters, put down to inflation, departures and a general 'decline in participation'. Eric Bohm, treasurer and a trustee until his retirement in 2012, was minuted, interestingly, as 'threatening to balance the budget to face realities'. Bohm recalls that, apart from him, there were only four treasurers who could even for once qualify as members of the 'Surplus Club'.

At the May 1997 council, to haul matters round, the three trustees—presumably including the dean—took on the role of treasurer jointly for three months. The scene lit up a little. By January 1998, there was a reported increase of \$400,000 worth of pledges over the year 1996, and the cathedral administrator, Viola Ip, had 'tightened up' the cash flow.

The On Lee apartment building in Pok Fu Lam, bought long ago with funds from the late Lady Chater, and whose shape was fought

over by Croucher and Marden, had become a crucial piece in the cathedral's financial game. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Bohm and Roger Cole, chairman of the Furnishings and Fittings Committee, had upgraded each flat as it became vacant, to maximize rental value. By 1994, On Lee rents represented 34 per cent of revenue against 31 per cent from stewardship and 16 per cent from collections. It was vital to St John's income. However, at the Annual Church Meeting of 1995, that year's stewardship campaign, forcefully led by the just-departed Chaplain and Precentor Erik Larsen, had brought pledged income just past On Lee's rental income. The annual report for the following year observed that the costs of repairs and maintenance at an ageing On Lee would make it less likely to be 'the cash cow' it once was.⁵ Today, the building plays a lesser role of being helpful but not crucial to cathedral income.

Some seek neatness and purpose in mission statements, but St John's mission refuses to be defined or bounded. Its ministries grow up without much premeditation and run without regimentation. An urge to define what St John's is or should really be all about is as strong in recent years as ever. It is thwarted as ever by a rambling spontaneity. The Holy Spirit does not seem to move men and women by pattern. There is a desire to help street sleepers, then orphans at the St Christopher's Home, then a hospice at Sha Tin, the people of Wan Chai at St James', then mistreated domestic workers, then families wracked by AIDS.

The cathedral works well, as most cathedrals should, as a city church and a centre of ministry and reflection for a weekday working community. Around St John's the number of offices is huge and grows. They have dwarfed the building and long ago blocked its view of the harbour. Yet their occupants approach in their scores before the day begins, through the lunch hours and their working weekends, to seek refuge from office politics, deals going bad, fears for their job, fatigue and worries over relationships and families. St John's has not been entirely passive in this ministry. Organised meditative prayer was introduced on Monday lunchtimes in 2009. The lunchtime concerts continue. Christians in Central hold a speaker lunch in the Li Hall once a month. Once a week too, there is a lunchtime Eucharist, and every weekday at 1 p.m. a priest says prayers in the nave.

The lunchtime ministry has grown up in recent years along with the MFMW, HDH, the counselling service and HIV/AIDS education.

Eventually, Reverend Julie Leaves's involvement with AIDS Comfort Care Concern and the library on AIDS-related topics she left behind developed into a fully fledged outreach programme. In September 1994, the Pastoral Committee looked for support for the AIDS ministry and set up a working party. It seems the widespread misconceptions about contagion from meeting people with HIV/AIDS had infected some in the cathedral. Hugh Phillipson of the Pastoral Committee, at its November meeting, said that St John's should be a source of strength and solace, not ignorance, and that the congregation needed educating about AIDS. In September 1995, the HIV Drop-In Centre was set up and opened by the governor's wife, Lavender Patten, in the new hall wing. The cathedral donated \$100,000, and other funding came from the AIDS Trust and the Matilda Hospital Charity. Moral support came from the Diocesan Welfare Council, and in May 1995, Elijah Fung was appointed full-time manager with a small staff and a group of volunteers. As yet, it is the only faith-based organisation to take up an AIDS ministry in Hong Kong. Its principle purpose is still the prevention and education on HIV/AIDS among women and young people in particular, and to reduce the stigma attached to the disease. The impact of the centre and the success of its methods have made it a resource for other provinces of the Anglican Communion looking to provide the same ministry.

Among the outreach ministries is ranked the Cathedral Bookshop, which, apart from doing a brisk trade in theological works, cards and candles, is a stopping place for some of the thousands a week who pass through the close from Central to the Peak Tram. It is a first point of enquiry about the cathedral, and on occasion even about the church and Christianity itself. The CLARES, begun back in 1962 by the unhappy Mrs. Till, is in high spirits, and its Castaways Shop for second-hand clothes and books thrives next door, in no apparent competition to the bookshop next door.

In 2011, the Sunday school, at over 200, has reached the levels of attendance seen in the high days of Mesdames Swann and Temple and Sidebotham. The irresistible opportunity of a morning's free English conversation leads some parents, with no particular religious belief, to set their children on a course of contact with the Christian message. One hundred sixty years ago, the parents of boys at St Paul's College, bemused perhaps but ambitious for them, did the same thing. Today, though, when the child comes to the altar rail after the school it is to receive the Sacraments and not just a blessing. St John's

has embraced child Communion, in common with other parishes in the Anglican Communion.

The choir developed a rigorous excellence under the direction of Raymond Fu, music master at St Paul's, who took over from the indefatigable Cecilia Kwok. Standards have met the considerable demands of the English Church choral repertoire. No complexity is shirked. Soprano voices had been supplied by St Stephen's Girls' College for a while. Now voices are recruited from men and women across a wide spread of the congregation and its contacts, so long as they can truly sing—and maintain an uncompromising practice programme.

The diversity of the cathedral and its worship is reflected in the sprouting of choirs. The main Choir remains at its core for the Sung Eucharist and a monthly choral matins. Apart from that, there exists now an Evensong Choir, the Children's Choir and the Filipino Choir. In 2011, the Main Choir returned delightedly to the past. A less satisfactory consequence of liturgical reform was reversed. The chancel was restored to much of its pre-1968 order and floor level. The original marble flooring was revealed, and the whole space regained its classic symmetry and openness whilst keeping the west-facing altar at the steps. The choir was put back into two parts, facing each other, north and south, in a way which is traditional and, they believe, makes better music.

Vyivian Copley-Moyle, who was commended for having handled the cathedral alone for periods at a time, would have been amazed and perhaps joshingly scornful over the seven stipendiary and seven non-stipendiary clergy available to the dean at St John's in 2012. Spreading what becomes a rich collection of temperaments and talents over the cathedral's four languages and eclectic involvements is a management challenge for the second decade of the twenty-first century. There is a view that we should not really count William Baxter in 1854, because he was never properly appointed as dean. However, if you do, and the Holman T. Hunt's teak board by the west door says we should, then Canon Matthias Der, who was installed in succession to Andrew Chan in October 2012, is the twenty-third Chaplain and Dean of the Cathedral Church of St John the Evangelist.

Vincent Stanton would not have been surprised to know that he had a successor of that number. He may have been a little shocked that that the Union flag was no longer flying over him, perhaps happy that he lived within the bounds of a reformed Chinese government but sad that it was atheist. What Stanton would have envied, if such a

sin was open to him, is the gushing of educational opportunity which the diocese provided and the teaching that went on in the cathedral that could bring between one and two hundred people a year—mostly Chinese—to baptism and confirmation under its roof.

He would have applauded the opportunity which this church he had helped found had grown to. That it was surrounded by materialism and unbelief would have not surprised him. That, in essence, is how it was with his beginning. He would probably have said to Dean Der that his inestimable advantage was that St John's was there and it stood strong, no matter that the landscape was venal, corrupted and sceptical.

Beneath the east window, which miraculously dulls to near silence the downhill racket of the Garden Road traffic, a thousand pray every Sunday; uncounted hundreds kneel in solitude through the week. Couples who know little about God and nothing of the future take a leap of faith. Those who now know everything about their future lie in caskets. Judges pray for their judgements. Ambulance workers give thanks for their work, and Americans give thanks for being so in November. Welshmen, Filipinas and visiting English schoolchildren sing. Vespers is sung to jazz. The sick are prayed over. Babies are baptised, national reconciliations are rejoiced over. At midnight on Christmas Eve, the people are crammed in every nook, they spill out back through the west door, and they sit in rows on the lawn watching on a screen. How the engineer in Charles St George Cleverly would have marvelled at that.

The marvels can be in the smallest things in St John's. A home group of Kerala Indian members from the St. Thomas Christian churches, led by a member of the St John's Cathedral Council, attend a service of evensong in the cathedral. Prayers are said in Malayam. Nothing of this sort could have been imagined by Chaplain Stanton or even foreseen perhaps by Dean Sidebotham.

The cathedral has moved from imperial confidence, through Edwardian complacency, reform, innovation and bouts of parochialism, to synodical unity, Chinese sovereignty and being the biggest church in the smallest province. From that 163 years of growth and shift, St John's is finding the role that makes paramount pastoral sense for it as an English-language Anglican church in a great Chinese city; that is, to be open, working and praying for all who it can touch and all who touch it.

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