

**St. Philip's African Orthodox Church:  
A Case Study of A Unique Religious Institution**

by

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## **Abstract**

This thesis is the result of a qualitative case study conducted within the congregation of St. Philip's African Orthodox Church in the neighbourhood of Whitney Pier in Sydney, Nova Scotia. St. Philip's is the only parish of the AOC in Canada. The purpose of this thesis is to understand and illustrate the uniqueness of this church. This is accomplished through an examination of the church's history in the area and the social supports the church offers to the contemporary Black community. A total of 10 long interviews were conducted with members of the congregation, as well as interviews with other clergy members in the Sydney area. The findings of this study support its designation as a unique religious institution.

## Chapter One Introduction and Literature Review

This thesis is a case study of the congregation of St. Philip's African Orthodox Church (AOC) in Sydney, Nova Scotia. This church has been an active part of the religious landscape of the area since its founding in 1921. As the only representative of this denomination in Canada, St. Philip's originally served the West Indian immigrants who came to work at the Sydney steel plant. In later decades, this particular ethnic focus of the church's membership shifted somewhat and the membership now includes Canadian-born Black members as well as some White members.

In the summer of 1996, I was employed with an organization which hosted community walking tours through Sydney, Nova Scotia and its various neighborhoods<sup>1</sup>. One of these walks focused on the many churches in Whitney Pier, a neighbourhood within Sydney with many ethnic groups<sup>2</sup>. It was during this walk that I became aware of St. Philip's AOC and learned that the church represented the only parish of this denomination in Canada. I had lived in Sydney all of my life and completed a bachelor's degree at the University College of Cape Breton, but it was not until this community walk that I was introduced to this very interesting sociological and religious phenomenon. This thesis examines the unique contribution of the AOC to

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<sup>1</sup> This organization was *ACT!* for a Healthy Sydney, a community health promotion organization sponsored by the Nova Scotia Department of Health and organized through the Community Health and Epidemiology Department at Dalhousie University.

<sup>2</sup> Whitney Pier was populated early in the 20th century by immigrants from Poland, the Ukraine, Czechoslovakia, etc. They came work at the steel plant in Sydney.



Black heritage, and explores the religious significance of such a church in Sydney.

My interest in Black religious allegiances and practices comes from a decidedly academic orientation. While an undergraduate, I had the opportunity to work with Dr. Jennifer Reid. She spent a portion of her course at UCCB on the importance of religion within Black communities. Her introduction to this area of religious studies stimulated my interest and, as a result, I decided to explore further the sociological significance of this parish.

From these divergent areas came my interest in St. Philip's as a topic for research. I wanted to study an element of my community that was not typical of what one saw in the mainstream religious institutions of Sydney. My aim was to determine why a church such as the AOC would have its only Canadian parish in Sydney when there were larger, more vocal Black and West Indian communities in Toronto and Halifax. In undertaking such a project I am hopeful I will be able to give something back to my community.

While the number of members of the Black and West Indian community who attend St. Philip's has declined, the church still serves an important function within the Black community of Sydney. As this thesis will argue, St. Philip's is the only expression of Black culture in the City of Sydney. This thesis aims to answer the question of what this church offers to the Black community in Sydney that could explain its persistence. Essentially, this thesis will show how St. Philip's African Orthodox Church is

a unique religious institution in Sydney and why it is both an important and interesting aspect of sociological history in Nova Scotia.

The singular nature of the church in Sydney will be addressed first by a reflection and analysis on its historical development within the community and secondly, by a review of the present social organization of the church and its service to Whitney Pier and the greater Sydney community. The historical development of the church is based on the social situation which faced West Indian immigrants when they arrived in Whitney Pier. It is argued that adverse conditions necessitated the foundation of a separate Black church. A second data analysis chapter explores the place of the church within its surrounding communities today. Membership numbers may be declining, yet I will show that the church maintains an active presence within the community. I will also address why this is so and what the changes are which the church is facing for the future.

By way of method, in this introductory chapter I aim to set the scene for my study of St. Philip's by first providing demographic information of ethnic populations using historical descriptive statistics on the composition of the Black community in relationship to other communities in the province and the country. Second, a review of the literature will include a discussion of why a specifically Black church is integral to the Black community in general and in particular to the congregation of St. Philip's. Third, literature on the role of Black women within the church is examined, since the majority of the

people who attend St. Philip's are women. Fourth, a final section reviews the available literature on the AOC.

### *Ethnic Composition and Population Characteristics*

First, it is important to gain some sense of the relative size of the Black community in Cape Breton County. This can be done in part by comparing it to the Black community in Canada. According to Statistics Canada figures, in 1991 Nova Scotia had the third largest single-origin Black population in Canada; only Ontario and Quebec had larger populations. This is significant given that Nova Scotia's population is only the seventh largest in the country (899,942 in 1991). Relative to the rest of Canada, Nova Scotia's population is small but the segment of the population which identifies itself as Black is larger than in the rest of Canada. Table 1.1 illustrates the Black population of Canada in the Eastern provinces and in Ontario and Quebec. The Nova Scotian Black population is nearly 10 times larger than the number of Black persons in the rest of the Atlantic Provinces. The number of Black residents in Newfoundland, Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick total only 1 190.

**Table 1.1 Distribution of the 1991 Black Population in Canada in Selected Provinces<sup>3</sup>**

<b>Area Name</b>	<b>Black Origins (Single Ethnic Origin)</b>
<b>Canada</b>	224 620
<b>Newfoundland</b>	110
<b>Prince Edward Island</b>	30
<b>Nova Scotia</b>	10 825
<b>New Brunswick</b>	1 050
<b>Quebec</b>	41 165
<b>Ontario</b>	150 685

(Adapted from 1991 Statistics Canada data)

Table 1.2 illustrates the distribution of the Nova Scotian Black community for the top four counties and the other counties on Cape Breton Island. This table shows that the number of Black residents (7,280) is highest in Halifax County, the largest county in Nova Scotia. Cape Breton County, which includes the City of Sydney and the congregation of St. Philip's, has the second largest population of Black people (590). The next largest Black communities in Nova Scotia according to the official census are in Guysborough County which has 400 Black residents and Colchester County with 395 Black residents.

It is interesting to note the distribution of the Black community in the counties of Cape Breton Island: Cape Breton, Richmond, Victoria and Inverness. Although Cape Breton County's Black population is the second largest in the province, the Black community is not well-represented in the other counties. The census shows Inverness and Richmond counties as having no Black residents and Victoria county as having only 10.

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<sup>3</sup> The Western provinces of Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, and British Columbia and the Territories have not been included since the figures are lower than the Nova Scotia figures and they are not relevant to the thesis.

**Table 1.2 Black Population in Selected Counties in Nova Scotia<sup>4</sup>**

<b>Area Name</b>	<b>Black Origins, Single Ethnic Origin</b>
<b>Halifax County</b>	7 280
<b>Cape Breton County</b>	590
<b>Guysborough County</b>	400
<b>Colchester County</b>	395
<b>Victoria County</b>	10
<b>Richmond County</b>	0
<b>Inverness County</b>	0

(Adapted from 1991 Statistics Canada data)

Cape Breton County includes the larger, more urban areas of Cape Breton Island, i.e., Sydney and Glace Bay, while the other three counties are predominately rural. Sydney has the largest population of single origin Black residents with 380, more than three times that of Glace Bay which has only 120 members of the Black community. The other four communities with Black residents have a total Black population of under 100 persons.

**Table 1.3 Black Population in Selected Cape Breton Island Municipalities<sup>5</sup>**

<b>Area Name</b>	<b>Black Origins, Single Ethnic Origin</b>
<b>Sydney</b>	380
<b>Glace Bay</b>	120
<b>New Waterford</b>	60
<b>Cape Breton Subdivision B</b>	15
<b>Cape Breton Subdivision A</b>	10
<b>Port Hawkesbury</b>	10

(Adapted from 1991 Statistics Canada data)

The numbers presented in the above tables may under-represent the actual Black population since they include only those people who indicated

<sup>4</sup> Not all Nova Scotia counties are listed since the number of Black residents in all counties are not needed to illustrate the size of the Black community in Cape Breton.

<sup>5</sup> The six communities contained in this table are those which listed a Black population. There are 18 other Cape Breton communities with no Black population which are not listed in this table. These communities include three Aboriginal reserves and other non-urban

the single origin of Black on the 1991 census form. Multiple origins were not included in the tables since they do not identify the specific ethnic groups. For example, a person with an ethnic heritage of English and Danish is included in the “multiple origins” category with a person who listed Black and Italian as their heritage.

As well, the data may not accurately represent the population of the Nova Scotian Black population due to a change in the wording of how the question of ethnicity was asked in the 1996 Census. According to the 1996 Census there are 18 110 Black residents in Nova Scotia and 800 members of the Black community in Cape Breton county, all of whom are in the amalgamated Cape Breton Regional Municipality (CBRM). In 1996 the Census asked directly about a person’s race while this information was achieved in earlier census by examining variables such as ethnic origin, place of birth, language and religion (EBSCO, 1998).

From the data on the Black population of Nova Scotia, its counties and the municipalities of Cape Breton, we can see it is not completely surprising why St. Philip’s AOC, a predominately Black church, would be located in Sydney, Nova Scotia. The Black population of Nova Scotia and Sydney may not seem particularly large when one looks at their respective figures. When one compares them to the rest of Canada and the population of Nova Scotia, however, the Black population of Nova Scotia and Sydney are significant in proportion to the population. The data obviously do not explain why there is

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areas.

only one parish of the AOC in Canada, but they do offer an insight as to the role it plays in Sydney, Nova Scotia.

Today, the AOC has only one congregation in Canada whereas in the United States the church is more prolific. It was reported in 1993 that there were 5,100 members of the AOC in 17 congregations (Melton, 1993: 274). All but one of the parishes are in the Eastern portion of the country<sup>6</sup>. The AOC has churches in New York City, Boston, Philadelphia, St. Louis, Miami, and Chicago (Archbishop Waterman). There is one church in San Francisco, St. John Coltrane, which calls itself an AOC although the available information on the church does not discuss its theological precepts. Rather, they focus on the church's connection with the jazz saxophonist John Coltrane (Santoro, 1995: 29; Ladd-Wilson, 1998).

In discussions with the Archbishop of the AOC in Sydney, Vincent Waterman, it was discovered St. Philip's has a sister church in New York which has approximately two to three hundred members. St. Philip's church in Whitney Pier is not fortunate enough to have numbers resembling their sister church. The church in Sydney claims thirty families as official members. On a typical Sunday, however, there are approximately twelve people in the pews of the church, three people in the choir, the Archbishop and an altar girl. The average age of the congregation, including the choir, is sixty years old and all but three people in the church are women. Most of the

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<sup>6</sup> The AOC did expand into Africa in the 1920's but problems emerged and the African churches split from the AOC in North America in the 1930's (Natsoulas, 1981: 100). The

congregation is of West Indian heritage. There are three White people in the church and only two Black members are Canadian-born.

Membership numbers within St. Philip's have declined dramatically over the decades. Although membership records were not available during data collection, one can chart the decline of church membership through early editions of the *Negro Churchman*, the official organ of the AOC, and baptismal records of the church. The *Negro Churchman* contained important summaries of activities from the various churches of the AOC. The church rectors from St. Philip's who wrote to the *Negro Churchman* to update the other congregations about St. Philip's frequently mentioned large membership in its early history wherein "the Church is filled to its capacity with earnest and devout worshippers" (June, 1923; see also June 1924, January 1926, April 1927, and June 1929). The reports to the newsletter did not include the actual number of people who were members of the church. In this case it is only the subjective perception of the rector which supports the claim of a large congregation. Given the physical size of the church today and noting there was once a balcony to accommodate members, one can estimate that there were close to 150 people who attended St. Philip's in its early years.

This perception of an initially larger membership which then declined is supported by baptismal records kept by the church between 1922 and 1978. The number of baptisms performed rose until the 1940's with a high of 83 but

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church also had branches in Cuba, Barbados, Nicaragua (Terry-Thompson, 1956).



this number dropped to 47 in the 1950's. The numbers continued to decline during the 1960's and 1970's to a low of 23 baptisms between 1970 and 1978.

The following table illustrates the data<sup>7</sup>:

**Table 1.4: Number of Baptisms within St. Philip's by Decade<sup>8</sup>:**

<b>Decade</b>	<b>Number of Baptisms</b>
1920s	50
1930s	79
1940s	83
1950s	47
1960s	44
1970s	23
<b>Total</b>	<b>344</b>

The decline in the baptismal rate indicates two patterns within the church membership. First, the church's population is aging. These members have already had their children. Secondly, it appears that the younger people of the community are not joining St. Philip's or having their children baptized there. There are several reasons for this situation and they will be discussed in later chapters.

Within St. Philip's, the majority of people who attend Mass are women. This figure is not surprising given the percentage of women, regardless of ethnicity, who attend church regularly. Black women have typically held a place of reverence within the Black church. The status of Black women within the church and the reasons for it will also be addressed as well as the importance of their contribution to sustaining St. Philip's.

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<sup>7</sup> It should be noted that although the baptismal records end in 1978 it is not clear if they ceased because records were no longer kept or if the church has not had baptisms since that year.

<sup>8</sup> The records for the 1920s begin in 1922 while those for the 1970s cease in 1978.

## *Literature Review*

### *Theoretical Framework*

Religion has been studied ethnographically in both its traditional and its non-traditional forms. Non-traditional groups, within which I would include St. Philip's AOC, do not have necessarily the same institutional framework as the more traditional groups. St. Philip's status as predominately Black church distinguishes it from other more mainstream religious organizations. As well, I would argue that St. Philip's amalgam of different religious traditions: Anglican, Orthodox, Protestant, and Roman Catholic, further separates it from the more traditional religious groups. Due to the non-traditional elements of these groups, they are best studied using qualitative methodology and interpretive theoretical perspectives. In this case this approach used will draw on symbolic interaction. Before explaining the manner in which the theory was applied in this thesis, I will first discuss why an interpretive or more specifically, a symbolic interactionist approach to religion is beneficial to scholars of religion.

Interpretative approaches to the study of religion in sociology began with the publication of Berger and Luckmann's *The Social Construction of Reality* (1967). In this work, the authors claim "Compared to the reality of everyday life, other realities appear as finite provinces of meaning, enclaves within the paramount reality marked by the circumscribed meanings and modes of experience" (Berger and Luckmann, 1967: 25). An event, then, can

be examined on (at least) two levels: the objective reality of what occurs at a given time and the meaning an individual participant may place on it. While not dealing specifically with particular religious beliefs, one can see how an approach such as this would benefit analyses of religious groups since it allows for their interpretations of what the “objective reality” means to them.

Berger ([1967] 1990) extended this interpretive approach specifically to the study of religion in *The Sacred Canopy*. Berger ([1967] 1990: 12) claims “no human construction can be accurately called a social phenomenon unless it has achieved that measure of objectivity that compels the individual to recognize it as real.” Although he does require a consensus of what is actually occurring in a given time period, Berger ([1967] 1990: 13) recognizes the meanings associated with the ‘objective reality’ are as potentially unique as the individuals themselves.

To be sure, the individual may have any number of highly subjective self-interpretations, which will strike others as bizarre or as downright incomprehensible. Whatever these self-interpretations may be, there will remain the objective interpretation of the individual’s biography that locates the latter in a collectively recognized frame of reference.

Religious experience, then, is intimately personal even though the person may be worshipping in a group.

Symbolic interactionism is based on the idea that meaning arises out of the social interaction between people and /or groups and this meaning may change given a person’s interpretation of a given situation (Ritzer, 1992:

348,370). The goal of the symbolic interactionist is to uncover these emergent meanings. Since symbolic interaction offers such an interpretive approach to the study of social phenomenon - in this case the importance of certain activities in the promotion of ethnic heritage – a symbolic interactionist approach will be used to guide the data analysis. This theoretical view complements the data analysis because of its emphasis on socially constructed meaning. Evidence for its applicability can be seen in a comment by Denzin (1993: *x*):

Symbolic interaction is an interpretive perspective sensitive to its historical moment. Symbolic interactionists have always oriented their work to the worlds of lived experience, to the emotions, the communicative structures, social relationships, and interactive experiences that bind human beings to one another.

Using this approach the researcher will be in a position to understand the meanings placed on certain activities by the followers of a particular religious community.

Despite the seeming “fit” between symbolic interactionism and the study of religion there appear to be few studies within the sociology of religion which use this approach as a theoretical framework. I believe my focus on the role of St. Philip’s within the Black community of Whitney Pier and the meanings placed on it from both church and community members makes this approach illuminating and useful.

I will turn to a more formal review of the literature relating to religion in Black communities in the New World.

*Black Religion*<sup>9</sup>

The story of Black religion in the New World begins with the institution of slavery and the extreme degradation of human beings who were kidnapped and sold. There is a great deal of research material available on this subject. Most of it indicates that slave traders from the very beginning treated the slaves like animals. We can see this in the treatment given to slaves on ships through the Middle Passage on the Atlantic Ocean en route to the New World (Harding, 1981: 3-23). Rabiteau (1978: 4) places the number of Africans that came to the New World as slaves at ten million although this figure has been contested<sup>10</sup>.

The mistreatment of slaves once they reached the shores of the Americas has been well-documented (Winks, 1971: 51; Blassingame, 1977: 467, 550; Harding, 1981: 38). They were subjected to much brutality and humiliation. In the colonial era (c. 1580-1850), Western attitudes towards subjugated, non-White peoples were based in part on the understanding that Whites were superior in terms of culture, religion, and technology. This belief was used as a justification for slavery as Black Africans were perceived

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<sup>9</sup> The reader should note that in this thesis, only expressions of Black Christianity are focused upon. The importance of other religious traditions in the Black community, such as Islam and Judaism are not addressed.

<sup>10</sup> See for example Gueye (*Unesco Courier*) who cites a figure of twenty million. The crux of this argument may surround the figure of Africans who died during the passage to the New World versus the number of Africans who survived.

as “an alien, non-Christian, nonwhite people” (Harding, 1981: 8)<sup>11</sup>. In other words, slaves were perceived as inferior from the point of view of their humanity, i.e. they were not human.

One of the more demoralizing elements of slavery was the break-up of married couples, parents, children and extended families. Under the system of slavery, long-term relationships were difficult to maintain because at any moment one of the persons could be sold: “I was married in East Tennessee, and lived with my husband six years. Then his master took him to Alabama, and I never saw him any more” (Blassingame, 1977: 468) One former slave told of being separated from his mother when he was only nine years old, “Slavery was a cruel condition . . . Nobody unless a victim of the practice can realize the old sufferings of mothers as [they saw] their children snatched from their arms and sent to distant plantations with the knowledge they were never to be seen again” (Blassingame, 1977:476-477).

Slavery was not simply the buying and selling of humans - it was a concerted effort to deny them status as human beings with souls. In the American Constitution, slaves were legally defined as not being fully human. One report states they were considered ‘three-fifths human’ (Long, 1985: 139). Similarly, the *Code Noir*, the French document outlining the treatment of slaves allowed that slaves had souls, but it still considered them to be “moveable property” (Futcha, 1994: 19). In Canada, slaves in the

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<sup>11</sup> While slaves were later baptized by their owners and went to church, these factors did not result in better treatment.

French colonies were categorized as *panis*, a French word meaning furniture (Winks, 1971: 9). A slave had as much right to freedom as a wardrobe or a table, which is to say, they had none at all. Slaves were considered to be just another piece of property of the slave owners.

Slavery in Canada may not have been as extensive as it was in the Southern United States, but there is a record of allowing people to be bought and sold in Canadian history. This situation speaks to White treatment of those groups of people we define as "other". Slavery was granted legal status in the French colonies in 1689 by Louis XIV of France although the colonists had owned slaves since 1629 (Bertley, 1977: 25, Winks, 1971: 1-3). Under British rule, the system of slavery became more entrenched and defined legally (Winks, 1971: 24). As a caveat to this situation, by 1793 there were motions within the British Parliament for the abolition of slavery (Winks, 1971: 25-26). By the early 1800's slavery had ceased to be a legal institution within Upper and Lower Canada, but its effects were still being felt (Bertley, 1977: 25-26). One should not assume that the dissolution of the legal institution of slavery in North America has meant its complete abolition. There are contemporary examples of slavery and indentured workers in the present period as is discussed in a recent special issue of *Unesco Courier* (1994). The issue addressed both the historical roots of slavery and its modern use.

When Blacks had to come to terms with the brutality of slavery, one of their responses was not, unexpectedly, religious. They had to “re-imagine” (Reid, 1995: 13) their history in such a way as to make sense of their world. According to C. Eric Lincoln (1974: 2), “black religion is a conscious effort on the part of black people to find spiritual and ethical value in the understanding of history. Their history”. Black religion, then, is not simply White, or mainstream, religion in a Black community or a church with a Black congregation, or Black minister. Rather, it is ultimately and intimately tied to the historical and material experience of the Black community in the New World. Religion cannot be divorced from the historical context of a people. Reid (1995: 13) concurs with this view of religion when she claims, “Despite the fact that human beings are historical in terms of their physical existence, we are religious in the sense that we lay claim to the ability to re-imagine our history in such a way as to give our lives meaning.” The importance of the ability to re-create one’s history can be seen in the title of Long’s (1986) work on Black religion, *Significations*. In this work, Long argues that White America has attempted to signify the Black community, to designate it as “other” or “meaningless”, but they have resisted this labeling and have created their own meanings.

Throughout the Black religious tradition we are witness to a number of individuals who used religion to promote the cause of the Black community in America. We can see this in the works of Nat Turner (Harding, 1981),



Richard Allen (Allen, 1985), David George (Winks, 1971), and Martin Luther King Jr. (King Jr., 1985), just to name a few. There are some Black scholars and intellectuals alike who are not clergy members, but they have obviously been influenced by religion and the Christian tradition. In reading the work of scholars like bell hooks and Cornell West, one is aware that Black religion, specifically Black Christianity, has played an important role in shaping their theoretical frameworks. “Both Cornell and I [bell hooks] come to you as individuals who believe in God. That belief informs our message” (hooks and West, 1991: 8; see also Gregory, 1973; Dodson, 1988).

As well, religion is often a focus of African American scholarship. Many scholars recognize the importance of the institution to the Black community and see its ‘liberating’ nature (Paris, 1996). Long (1985, 139) sees the religious response in Black communities to be of fundamental importance if North America is to understand its own meaning. “American culture has yet to come to terms with its ‘native sons’<sup>12</sup> - and that is just another way of saying that America has yet to come to terms with itself”<sup>13</sup>. Many scholars see the need for a Black theology of liberation, (Long, 1985: 193-197; see also,

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<sup>12</sup> The term “native sons” may be a reference to Richard Wright’s novel, *Native Son*, a novel about violence in the Black community. Violence should not be seen simply as “physical abuse” but as a “mode of valuation . . . the desire to dominate, to deny others their freedom of action or self-expression, and to deny the mutuality of human relationships” (Reid, 1993: 7 fn. 22)

<sup>13</sup> While Long is correct in his assertion that in order for America to know itself it must understand those communities it has designated as “other” it should be noted that it is not only the Black community that must be addressed. Anyone who has had to come to terms with the point of colonial contact can speak to this issue, e.g. the Aboriginal and Hispanic communities.

Cone, 1985; Lincoln and Mamiya, 1990: 178). In all of its guises, religion is seen as vital to the spirit of liberation for the Black community.

The notion of 'community' within the Black experience is also of obvious importance as are the relationships matured within it. Often there is a feeling of singularity within the Black community. For example, John Coltrane commented that when jazz and blues songs said "I" the audience heard "we" (Carby, 1990: 242). They felt a connection that went beyond the individual; the audience could empathize and sympathize with the suffering of their peers. The title of the sociologist W.E.B. DuBois' work, *The Souls of Black Folk*, also speaks to this communal connection. The souls are many but there is only one 'folk', one group<sup>14</sup>. This sense of community and the resulting social networks acted as a "powerful buffer" against the nihilistic experience of slavery and racism (West, 1993: 15).

In her studies, *All Our Kin* (1974) and *Call to Home* (1996), Carol Stacks illustrates how members of Black communities worked together to ensure their individual and collective survival. They had complex relationships based on reciprocity not only so friendship would be reinforced but also so neighbours would be there for each other when help was needed, especially when family members became separated or left their communities. 'Community' was also a means of survival for former slaves. Since many families were broken up during the time of slavery, Black people had little experience of a nuclear family on whom they could depend in times of need.

Many in the Black community sought to re-create their own family structure. Stacks (1974) cites examples of how people, especially women, described themselves as family members because of their mutual dependence. There was not a history of turning to one's family in the Black community in times of need but one could always turn to a neighbour.

An examination of slavery is important because it also signals the beginning of the White community's perception of a group of people as sub-human. This labeling or signification (Long 1985) of the Black community did not end with the abolition of slavery. Indeed, one could argue that we in North America are in some ways still feeling its effects<sup>15</sup>. It is argued that the Black community is in many ways an oppressed community. This is why the Black church is an important element of the Black community. It is a place where Black men and women can, in a sense, step out of a society which does not allow them full access to areas of meaning (e.g., academia, the judicial and economic systems, politics) and which offers them a place where they can control the meaning and significance of their community.

Although none of the members of St. Philip's have had the experience of being a slave, as part of the larger Black population within North America they are affected by slavery's dehumanizing focus. Slavery ended over a century ago, but some of the ideas which White Canadians held about being Black did not change. It may not have been legal in the mid-1800's to own

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<sup>14</sup> I am indebted to Dr. Jennifer Reid for this analysis.

<sup>15</sup> For example, Long (1985: 186) has stated "The issue of race still lies at the heart of many

slaves, but this is not to suggest the Black community was welcomed into the mainstream of Canadian society. The institution of slavery was replaced by acts of racism since the notions which had supported slavery, (e.g. the superiority of White culture) only slowly changed. "Its roots [discrimination] lay in slavery, where the relationship of structured inequality was initiated" (Walker, 1985: 22)

It can be argued that racism is not simply the overt act of calling a person a derogatory name or denying a group access to certain areas of society. It also includes actions such as "the slight movement away from a person of colour in an elevator; the overattention to the Black customer in the shop; the inability to make direct eye contact with the person of colour . . . and the ubiquitous question 'Where did you come from?'" (Henry et al; 1995: 47). These actions may not compare to the physical brutality of slavery but they stem from the same source, the designation of who White Canadians deem to be 'others.'

Up to this point, I have set down a record of scholarly works that focus on slavery. This is an important part of the background of any Black community in North America, St. Philip's in Sydney included. I have also indicated how racism is a collateral aspect of slavery which survived the 19<sup>th</sup> century closure of an institution. Since racism is a continuation of the beliefs which allowed the institution of slavery to exist, the Black religious response and the Black church are still relevant to Black communities today. St.

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of the issues confronting us in our common life."

Philip's AOC is one manifestation of this process. St. Philip's, an expression of Black religion, speaks to the Black community since it responds to the historical experience of being Black in Sydney, Nova Scotia. The church, then, responds to acts of racism within the community, the poor economic situation, and other pressures which affect Black community integrity and well-being.

The Black church, in general, is an inexorable part of the larger Black community. Dick Gregory (1973: 38), a well-known comedian and social activist rightly puts it this way: "The Negro Church has always meant a lot to the Negro - it was his [sic] club, his social life, a place where he could go and forget about the man downtown." The church could be a safe place, a place to escape the rigours of White society. The church could also function as a meeting place for others feeling the stresses of living in an oppressive society: "[a]t church I found some other lonely people who were feeling the same things and speaking the same thoughts" (Stacks, 1996: 76-77).

Thus far, the term 'Black church' has been used in this thesis, but the question needs to be asked: Does such an institution exist? The existence of an institution called the Black church has been somewhat problematic. Many people speak of Black churches, indeed Lincoln and Mamiya (1990) titled their survey of predominately Black congregations, *The Black Church in the African American Experience* and the label has already been used in

this thesis. When one speaks of the Black church, it is critical to note that the term does not refer to any particular church. Jones (1985: 491) stated:

It is important to perceive clearly that there is no “black church” in the conventional understanding of that term. There are denominations, composed of congregations of black persons and under their control, and there are countless free-standing congregations, but there is no one entity that can be called the black church.

While Jones is correct in noting that there is “no one entity that can be called the black church”, the term is effective as a heuristic device to discuss those congregations that maintain predominately Black memberships. Lincoln’s (1974) definition of the term ‘Black church’ is also useful given the previous discussion of the development of religion in Black communities. He claims:

The Black Church evolved, not as a formal, black ‘denomination’, with a structured doctrine, but as an attitude, a movement. It represents the desire of Blacks to be self-conscious about the meaning of their blackness and to search for spiritual fulfillment in terms of their understanding of themselves and their experience of history (Lincoln, 1974: 3).

The Black church, then, is the place where ‘re-imagining’ and making history within the Black community occurs.

In conclusion and by way of summary, in this section I have shown that although the institution of slavery ended over one hundred years ago, North Americans continue to be affected by its legacy. Discrimination and racism in contemporary North American society are remnants of this institution. Religion and the church have provided the Black community

with avenues to combat racism and a place to come together as a community to celebrate their ethnic heritage. Now I aim to extend this literature survey from themes of slavery, racism and Black religious identity by providing a survey of another crucial aspect of literature on Black community sociology. This concerns the role and place of women in the Black church, a subject important for my study of St. Philip's.

*Women in the Black Church*

Women have typically been revered within the Black Christian tradition. They maintained the church, served on committees, maintained benevolent societies and have generally held an authoritative place within it (Gilkes, 1985; Dodson, 1988; Moore, 1991; Gilkes, 1996). It is not surprising that despite many White feminists' attacks on the Christian Church as a place of oppression most Black women still feel a connection to the Black church (Daly, 1968; Arnold-Romero, 1974; Martin-Doyle, 1974). In *Breaking Bread*, hooks (hooks and West, 1991: 79) commented on her attachment to the church as a place of refuge:

despite the sexism of the Black church, it was also a place where many Black women found they could drop the mask that was worn all day in Miss Anne's house; they could drop that need to serve others. Church was a place you . . . could drop the layers of daily existence and get to the core of yourself.

The Black church may not have been a perfect institution, but it was a potential escape from a racist society.

The church may not have been free of sexism, but it was an avenue for women to exercise a modicum of power. Women had much authority within the Black church. Hooks and West, “however we might fault the Black church [for its sexism], it has always been a place where Black women have had dignity and respect” (Hooks and West, 1991: 79). Historically, women may not have held positions typically described as powerful, but they often created sustaining organizations within a particular church to work with the men’s organizations that held the official power (Dodson, 1988: 38). Dodson (1988: 39) claims, “only a narrowly conceived analysis of power would permit them [scholars who believe Black women have no power in the church] to conclude that women were powerless”<sup>16</sup>. Gilkes (1985, 681-3) and Dodson (1988: 38-40) both illustrate incidents where the women’s organizations operated in such a way as to give women an outlet for their voices and a means to exercise some control over the future of their churches.

While there are structures set up within churches to offer women a place to exercise their authority, there is a theological tradition of strong women that has been supported by Black churches. In her work on women in the Black Baptist Church, Brooks Higginbotham (1993: 125) cites Mary Cook’s interpretation of the Bible as “an ‘iconoclastic weapon’ that would destroy negative images of [the female] sex and overcome the popular misconceptions of women’s place in the church and society.” In her analysis of

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<sup>16</sup> Much of Dodson’s work is based on research in the African Methodist Episcopal tradition. Gilkes (1985) provides a similar analysis in her work on the Sanctified Church.



the slave spirituals, Gilkes (1996: 575, 570) found that women were “celebrated and affirmed” and were indeed presented as “pivotal actors.”

### *Ethnicity in Canada*

As part of this literature review, the subject of descriptions of ethnicity in Canada must be explained within contemporary discourse. This has been important in my understanding of social theory. In the forward to Shaffir’s *Life in a Religious Community* (1974: iv), Malcom Spector stated, “Only a dictionary of Canadian English could define the word ‘Ethnic’ as ‘people who are neither English nor French’.” Other definitions of ethnicity have focused on various cultural features, but the more common definition includes elements such as the group into which one is born, race and religion. Herberg (1989:3), for example claims that the term “ethno-racial-religious group” is a more accurate manner in which to describe ethnicity and ethnic groups. For the sake of simplicity, however, he uses the terms ‘ethnic group’ and ‘ethnicity’. Bissoondath (1994: 99) offers a variation on this theme when he describes ethnicity as “the classification of human beings by race, religion, language, cultural traditions and other traits held in common.” Ethnicity, then, is a characteristic attached by society to a person or group.

Although the Black community is often considered to be a singular ethnic group, there are differences which must be noted within the Canadian Black population. Recent Caribbean immigrants, for example, may have different expectations than Canadian-born Black persons who have a longer

history in Canada. In his work, *A Place Called Heaven: The Meaning of Being Black in Canada* (1996), Foster for example, discusses the treatment and status of Black persons in Canada from the perspective of Caribbean immigrants who settled in major Canadian metropolitan centres. While his analysis is valuable given that most Black immigrants move to urban areas, it neglects entire subsections of an ethnic group. The situation of the Canadian-born Black population, or those of Black African descent, or Black British immigrants, are not included, and the issues that could be addressed in such an examination might call into question some of the perceptions held about the Black community. The Black population in North America, then, cannot be treated as a homogenous group. Oddly, the existing literature rarely recognizes the diverse origins of the Black community (e.g. Caribbean, African, etc.).

Conducting research on Canadian Black communities apart from ethnicity is also problematic. In 1971, historian Robin Winks published *The Blacks in Canada*. Since then, this text has served as the main reference source for the study of the Black population of Canada. In the preface to this work, Winks (1971: ix) observes:

At no time in the twentieth century have Negroes comprised more than a tiny fraction of the Canadian population, and although accurate statistics are virtually impossible to find, the Negro proportion of the population probably is no more than two percent today. For this reason alone, although there are others as well, this chapter of the Negro's story has been ignored by historians of both Canada and the Negro.

There are other works which address the history of the Black community in Canada, (George E. Simpson and James Walker) but there is little in terms of new scholarship<sup>17</sup>.

*The African Orthodox Church in the Literature*

It has been shown that religion is a common theme in much of the literature dealing with Black religion. Unfortunately, this focus has not touched the AOC. Many of the available sources cover the history and the origin of the church (Terry-Thompson, 1956; Newman, 1977; Newman, 1983, Platt, 1989). Early editions of the church's newsletter, *The Negro Churchman*, have been bound and made available, although this two volume set covers only the first ten years of the AOC's history. Other references to the church are usually found within the context of the connection the founder of the AOC, Patriarch McGuire had to the Universal Negro Improvement Association or the AOC's roots in Pan-African nationalism (Cronon, 1968; Winks, 1971; Burkett, 1978a; Burkett, 1978b, Baer and Singer, 1992).

The existing literature focuses primarily on the AOC as a social institution. Two studies have been conducted on the Canadian congregation within the AOC. Both of these studies examine elements of St. Philip's, the focus of this thesis. One study examined the use of architecture in the three ethnic churches in Whitney Pier (Beaton-Planetta, 1984)<sup>18</sup> and the other

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<sup>17</sup> In 1997, Winks released a second edition of *The Blacks in Canada* but it was simply a re-issue and not a revised text. He claimed that to update the subject matter would be the cause for another book.

<sup>18</sup> The three ethnic churches are St. Philip's African Orthodox Church, St. Mary's Catholic

(Beaton, 1988) the church's role in the maintenance of ethnic identity for the West Indian community.

The AOC in Sydney has also been the subject of some misinformation on the part of some scholars. In his work, *Black Religion in the New World*, George E. Simpson (1978: 274) claimed:

The most militant Negro religious organization ever established in Canada was a branch of the African Orthodox Church formed in *Sidney (British Columbia)* in 1921. A representative of Archbishop George A. McGuire, the church's founder, ministered to the religious needs of West Indians who worked in the steel mills (my emphasis).

It is more than the geography and spelling that Simpson has incorrect; his gaffe indicates a lack of knowledge about the AOC in Canada. It is my hope that this thesis helps to address some of the development and social issues surrounding this church and its place in the creation and maintenance of Black ethnic identity in Whitney Pier, Nova Scotia, and in Canada.

### *Concluding Comments*

This literature review has offered the reader a context within which to judge the following chapters on St. Philip's and the AOC, as an important Black church and denomination. By way of method, Chapter Two explains the methods used to research this thesis. Chapter Three offers the reader a history of the origin of the AOC in the United States and Chapter Four provides a description of the community and church. The data analysis has been separated into two chapters for the purpose of illustrating the unique

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Church which serves the Polish community and the Holy Ghost Ukrainian Church.

nature of the church. Chapter Five examines the history of the church in Whitney Pier as a part of Sydney, while Chapter Six discusses the nature of the activities hosted by the church and the Archbishop and their place within the Black community. A final chapter summarizes my findings for the reader.

## Chapter Two Methods

This chapter describes the various methods used to conduct research on the topic of this thesis. Speaking broadly, I have structured a case study to research the parish of St. Philip's African Orthodox Church. The case study method will be defined in this chapter and it will be illustrated why the methods used in the data collection are appropriate to this research project. I then explain the four methods used by the researcher in the data collection: participant observation in the church and community; semi-structured interviews with key informants and church members; historical research into the origin of the African Orthodox Church in North America and also the development of St. Philip's parish in Nova Scotia; and interviews with the clergy of other churches in and around the community of Whitney Pier in an effort to discover which had active Black members and therefore, in one way or another served the Black community.

### *Case Study*

A case study "refers to research that focuses on a single case or single issue, in contrast with studies that seek generalizations through comparative analysis or compilation of a large number of instances" (Reinharz, 1992: 164). Miles and Huberman (1994: 25) give a similar definition when they describe a case "as a phenomenon of some sort occurring in a bounded context". They expand on the type of phenomenon suitable for a case study when they state

that a single case can include “an individual in a setting, a small group, or a larger unit such as a department, organization or community” (Miles and Huberman, 1994: 90).

Since the case study method seeks to explore the uniqueness, or that which is different, its use is particularly fitting in this thesis. St. Philip’s is the only parish of the AOC in Canada. Hence the case study method is the best one for my purposes (see Knowles, 1995; Hewitt, 1991; Campbell, 1988; Mullins, 1988 for examples of case studies conducted on religious groups in Canada).

#### *Description of Methods*

Before beginning the task of describing more fully the methods used in this thesis, the reason the decision was made not to use a pseudonym for St. Philip’s must be addressed. Most literature that attempts to study a community will change the name of the community to protect the identity of the people who are involved and it might well have been argued that I do the same (Stacks, 1996; Williams, 1987; Stacks, 1974). I have two reasons for the decision to use the name of the community and the church. One is the initial reason for doing this study: I want to highlight the community of Whitney Pier and draw attention to its unique sociological nature and characteristics. The other reason is more of a justification for the decision. Beaton, in her two articles on the church (1984, 1988), does not change the name of the church and uses the name of the church throughout the papers. The issue of

identifying the church by name has been discussed with the Archbishop and he has given his permission for its use in this thesis.

The name of the church, St. Philip's will be used throughout this thesis. The names of the people who agreed to participate in my research and their identities, will of course be kept anonymous. Excerpts from the interviews will be cited using pseudonyms for the people involved. There is one caveat to the issue of the anonymity of the participants and that is the identity of the Archbishop and past clergy. Here, permission has been granted to use the name of all clergy and functionaries in St. Philip's past and present parish life. The name of the church's former Archpriest, Father George Francis, is a matter of public record. The decision has been made that the name of the present clergy, Archbishop Vincent Waterman, will also be used in the thesis. In this particular case, then, the assumption of anonymity is not available so Archbishop Waterman's name will be used in the thesis<sup>1</sup>. It should be noted that this issue has been discussed with him and he has agreed that his name can be used.

### *Participant Observation*

Neuman (1997: 357) offers readers a table outlining various roles that a researcher can take in conducting fieldwork. Although he presents typologies, ranging from the researcher as complete observer to a complete participant, the typology presented by Junker in the text and used by Denzin

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<sup>1</sup> Having already identified the Church in this thesis, anonymity would be impossible.



(1978: 186-191) has been adopted. These roles range from complete participant, participant as observer, observer as participant and complete observer. These labels offer a better variation in the roles that a researcher can adopt in an ethnographic case study.

In the guise of the complete participant, the participants know who the researcher is and they are usually aware that they are being studied and the researcher fully participates in the activity. In participant as observer, the researcher is known as a researcher but participates in the community. The researcher passes through three stages of membership - which run from the initial meeting as a stranger, to a "provisional member" (Denzin, 1978: 188) where people recognize the researcher as a researcher and are inquisitive as to their role. Finally, the researcher is granted the status of a "categorical member" (Denzin, 1978: 189) whereby the participants recognize the role of the researcher but a level of rapport has been reached and they accept him or her as a 'member'. In the role of observer as participant, the researcher has a more formalized meeting with members and the opportunity to develop a high level of rapport is not present. The final role, that of complete observer, is one where the researcher is completely separate from the participants either through the use of a laboratory or the use of "invisible roles" (Neuman, 1997: 357). Invisible roles are those positions that are not noticed by the people in the area under observation, either as a bystander, or a role that gives little indication of the observer's attention.

Given the above description of the researcher's roles, it is the role of the 'observer as participant' that best fits my placement in the field. Originally, I had considered my role to be that of a non-participant observer because I was not a member of the church. Further research and reflection on my position within the church led me to the conclusion that I did engage in the role of an observer as participant. I feel that I was accepted as a member of the church, even when people knew I was there as a researcher. Even though I was there to observe the rituals and events within St. Philip's, I was treated as a full participant by members of the congregation. Examples of this treatment as a member can be seen in how several people asked me why I missed church services at St. Philip's when I had to come back to university and one time when I was late for a service, one of the women came up to me, touched my arm and said, "You were late for church". I was subject to the same type of informal sanctions that other members would potentially face in the same situations.

My role as observer as participant was realized in two areas. First, I went to Sunday church services at St. Philip's over a time period of six months in 1997 when I was in Sydney and I volunteered in activities run by the church, namely a chili dinner they sponsored in April and their large Caribbean Festival in August. In attending Mass, apart from acknowledging the spiritual dignity of the occasion, I also hoped that several of my academic objectives would be accomplished. The first task was to see who attended

services and get a sense of how often they attended. Observing how the congregation interacted with one another and the ethnic variation of the congregation was a second task. I wanted to recite the liturgy, participate in the ritual of the service and finally, I wanted to make myself known in the community and make contacts with church members so I could conduct interviews with them at a later time. By volunteering at the chili dinner and the Caribbean Festival, I was hoping to become better known in the community, to be able to build a rapport with the parishioners outside of church services, as well as to discover who volunteered to help and organize key events, and which sectors of the community came out to support the church.

In the observer as participant role, I believe I achieved the status of a 'novice' member within the church. The members of the congregation perhaps viewed me as they would a younger person coming into the church. I was not familiar with the ritual of the church and they helped me learn the liturgy. As well, I am noticeably younger than most members of the congregation, a fact that added to the perception of me as a youth.

I participated in the church services like other members, in the singing of hymns, praying, reciting the liturgy, and in the taking of communion<sup>2</sup>. Observations began in December, 1996 and continued in February, April, May, August, and December of 1997. In total, I was able to attend twelve

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<sup>2</sup> I was hesitant initially about taking communion in the church since I am not a member. Archbishop Waterman claimed that it was the spirit in which communion was taken that

services, including one where the service was led by lay readers since the Archbishop was away at a church Synod. Field notes were recorded after the services indicating things pertaining to who was present, how I was received, how the congregation interacted with one another, and if anything of interest to my thesis was said in the sermon.

My activities in the two events at which I volunteered (the chili dinner and the Caribbean festival) were varied. Parish dinners were a general fundraiser. I helped to serve the food, put together the packages, and finally deliver some of the dinners. At the Caribbean Festival my duties were a little more diverse. I helped to set up the area, run a game for children and work in the kitchen. Besides noting who had organized the event and who volunteered during the day, I also noted who in the Whitney Pier community came to the church-sponsored activities, as well as those who came from outside Whitney Pier, and how people in general interacted with each other while attending the event.

#### *Semi-structured Interviews*

The second method utilized is that of semi-structured interviews where I asked the participants a set list of questions, most of which are open-ended and contained in an interview guide. These questions were asked of all participants, but I allowed them to guide the interview in a different direction if they wanted to speak of something else (Reinharz, 1992). The

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was important and so I decided to receive communion at the Mass.

interview guide is divided into several broad categories (for a copy of the interview guide, see Appendix A). The first section is general demographic information. These questions relate to age, marital status, education, and family size. In this section, I hoped to obtain a general picture of the participant's socio-economic status, the average age of the participants, formal education received by the participant and their family. In the section on Personal History, I attempted to discover the country of origin of their parents and their reasons for migrating to Cape Breton. Following this line of questioning, participants were asked about their religious activities in Sydney, which churches they attended, and why they made the decision to attend St. Philip's. They were then asked about their experiences with possible racism in Sydney, both as younger people and in the present. The participants were asked to assess the level of racism as they saw it in the community. General questions regarding Whitney Pier and St. Philip's were proposed as were questions about the types of services offered by other denominations, and whether they were members of any secular community organizations. The interview guide concluded with questions about their relatives' and older children's' place of residence, children's marital status, occupations, and current religious involvement.

In total, I completed ten "long" interviews (McCracken, 1988), the average length being one hour. These interviews were complemented by informal discussions and conversations with members after church at various

social functions. People were found in two ways: through 'gatekeepers' and 'snowball sampling.' According to Neuman (1997: 351), a gatekeeper is "someone with the formal or informal authority to control access to a site". My gatekeepers in this research were the Archbishop and his wife. I asked the Archbishop for permission to study the church and interview some of its members before embarking on my research. I realized that if I did not have his approval it would be impossible for me to conduct the study. The Archbishop provided me with a list of potential participants and his wife introduced me to several people to whom she thought I should speak. Their obvious support for my research made people feel more comfortable speaking to me. Confidentiality for the participants was given in the use of a standardized consent form (See Appendix B) and this guarantee was reiterated verbally before the interview began.

### *Sampling*

The participants were recruited through a procedure of snowball sampling, a process whereby, "each person interviewed may be asked to suggest additional people for interviewing". (Babbie, 1992: G7). This type of purposive sampling was supported by simply asking people at the church if they would agree to be interviewed. Although I did not keep a formal record, the majority of people declined when I approached them for an interview. Several people claimed they were too busy or too ill, while others simply claimed there was nothing they could tell me which would be of interest. In

the latter case, they often suggested the names of others to whom I might want to speak.

### *Sampling Profile*

A sampling profile of the people interviewed is, in this case, a delicate matter. Since the name of the church has been given, I cannot be too specific about the sample without disclosing individual identities. However, I can present more general characteristics in order to set the stage for further analysis.

In total, I interviewed seven women and three men. There were several similarities among the people who agreed to be interviewed for this research. All were members of what I would consider to be the working class. Four of the husbands of the women I interviewed had worked at the Steel Plant and three of the women themselves had been employed in other blue-collar occupations. Two others worked as professionals and two had not worked outside of the home. Three of the women at the time of this research had been widowed but two of them had never been married.

The most common ethnic heritage of the interviewees was West Indian; all but two of the people were second-generation immigrants whose parents had come to Cape Breton during the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Family size decreased over time as the respondents reported coming from large families with four or more children while six of the same respondents stated they had three or fewer children.

### *Historical Analysis and Document Review*

One portion of my thesis includes an examination of the history of the African Orthodox Church and its links, however tenuous, to the Universal Negro Improvement Association. This examination has been achieved through a literature review and library searches and an examination of early church documents in the guise of the *Negro Churchman* which was the African Orthodox Church's official newsletter until recently (conversation with Deacon Shean, an historian of the African Orthodox Church)<sup>3</sup>.

Clearly there are limitations to these data sources. Those writing from the perspective of a member of the association will be putting forth their views of church history. However, as is the case with historical analysis, I am limited to these sources as there are other no accessible, alternative sources of documentation.

In examining the founding of St. Philip's in Sydney, I also conducted research on the history of Sydney so as to link the church and this community. The history included research on the steel plant, a major reason for immigration to Sydney at the turn of the century, and the treatment of other ethnic groups in Sydney. In doing this I aimed to place St. Philip's within the larger community context and note how the two interacted. In 1996, there were approximately 800 Black residents in the Cape Breton Regional Municipality (CBRM), of which Sydney is the largest community.

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<sup>3</sup> Later attempts to contact the Deacon proved to be unsuccessful and the information he intended to send never arrived.



### *Questions to Clergy of Other Denominations*

It is very clear when one enters St. Philip's for Sunday services that not all members of the Black community are in attendance. My next question, then, was what churches do they attend. Accordingly, I contacted clergy members in all of the churches in the Pier and several in Sydney (see Appendix C for the list). Three questions were asked: "How many Black members did they have?", "How had this changed over the years?", and "Approximately how many Black members attended their particular church each week?" Difficulty in answering these questions became apparent when some clergy members did not feel that they were in a position to respond, since they had not been part of the church for a substantial length of time. Some simply asked me to telephone Black members of the congregation to find out the answers.

I was able to gain more limited information from some of these contacts but the details of the religious activities of the Black community in Whitney Pier remain unknown. Clearly, this could be a sensitive area of questioning. Without a more systematic survey of other area churches (a task beyond the scope of this thesis) these questions remain essentially unanswered. Further research on Black religious activity might consider these questions in more detail.

### *Analysis*

The interviews conducted for this research were tape-recorded and

then transcribed by this researcher with an average record of twelve pages per interview. During this task a process of memoing, as discussed in Miles and Huberman (1994: 72-74) was conducted whereby themes from the interviews were noted in a record for later analysis. Pattern coding was employed as a means to code the interview data. In this process, the data were organized into themes in the individual interviews and then into common themes (see Miles and Huberman, 1994: 69-72).

### *Critical Distance*

Throughout the data collection and the data analysis for this thesis, I came to rely heavily on Archbishop Waterman. He introduced me to people to whom he thought would help me in my research as well as speaking to me about his own experiences within the African Orthodox Church, both in St. Philip's and in the United States. He offered many leads and sources which I may not have discovered on my own or only done so with a considerable amount of additional research. There is, however a caveat to the Archbishop's helpfulness; not all of it was for the benefit of a student conducting scholarly research within his church. It was clear that the Archbishop was attempting to put forth the best possible image of St. Philip's. For example, in an early interview, the Archbishop claimed that 50 families were members of the church. This was contradicted in a later interview where one church member claimed the Archbishop told them only 30 families were members.

The Archbishop, then, was attempting to relay one kind of story about St. Philip's and the AOC. He was coming from a particular vantage, one that was not necessarily in line with my own purposes. However, much of what the Archbishop said was compared to other information, both historical sources and from other interviews. Having multiple sources like this allows a fuller picture of the congregation of St. Philip's. I recognize the central place accorded to the data given by the Archbishop in this thesis and the potential problems with this approach. In a case study one is often limited by the information presented by key informants. However, interviews with the Archbishop do document the perspective of a powerful member of the AOC someone who has shaped the public face of St. Philip's in Whitney Pier. At the end of this thesis I will raise some questions about the alternative perspectives and other types of research that could complement the work presented here.

### *Concluding Comments*

In this section, I have described the methodology used to obtain research material. I argue that the mixed methods chosen allowed me to obtain a better overall picture of the community as well as the congregation. In addition to this advantage, triangulation of multi-methods is used to examine one phenomenon, in this case in its purely qualitative context (Denzin, 1978, Babbie, 1995). Denzin maintains that single-method research studies often fail because they have only one perspective. The triangulation

perspective allowed me to examine the church and the community in a way that I believe will benefit the methodology of a case study. This perspective will make this thesis more complete since I have been given the opportunity to research several different aspects of the same setting. The thesis now turns to a review of the historical background of St. Philip's in its association with the African Orthodox Church.

### Chapter Three History and Background of the African Orthodox Church

The African Orthodox Church, founded by George McGuire, was proclaimed an 'official' church on July 10, 1921 in Brooklyn, New York by the American Catholic Church<sup>1</sup> (Terry-Thompson, 1956: 31). Simply stating the date of incorporation does not speak to the reported development of the church within the Marcus Garvey Movement<sup>2</sup>- which McGuire joined in 1919 - or its affiliation with the American Catholic Church (ACC). This chapter discusses the history of the AOC from these two perspectives; the claim that the AOC developed from the Universal Negro Improvement Association, and the subsequent problem of the continuity of with its affiliation with Bishop Vilatte of the ACC. Before this history can be described, it is important that the reader know something about the founder and first Patriarch of the AOC, George Alexander McGuire, and his experiences within the American Episcopal Church of the United States<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> The ACC was founded in 1915 by Bishop Joseph Rene Vilatte. Melton claims theologically the church is close to the Liberal Catholic Church (Melton, 1993: 789-790).

<sup>2</sup> The Marcus Garvey Movement was a Pan-African Black nationalist organization which began in 1916. The Movement emphasized self-love (respect for one's ethnicity) and a belief that for the Black community to escape the effects of racism its people would have to act on "their own behalf and out of a conviction of their own intrinsic worth" (Watson, 1995: 79). For a summary of the Marcus Garvey Movement see Watson (1995) and for a discussion of the "Back to Africa" element of the Movement see Marable (1991).

<sup>3</sup>The reader should note that McGuire's affiliation was to the American Episcopal Church and not the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME). No references have been found suggesting that he had been affected by his brief affiliation with the AME.

*Patriarch and AOC founder McGuire*

George Alexander McGuire was born on the West Indian island of Antigua on 26 March 1866 (Newman, 1977: *iii*). After completing studies in the island's school system, he was educated in the Moravian Theological Seminary in Antigua and became a Moravian<sup>4</sup> pastor in the Virgin Islands. McGuire had parental ties to this group. While his father had been a member of the Episcopal church, and McGuire himself had been baptized in that tradition, his mother was a member of the Moravian church (White, 1969: 109)<sup>5</sup>. McGuire did not stay long in the West Indies; he left in 1893 for the United States where he continued his ecclesiastic work. He spent a brief period of time with the African Methodist Episcopal Church but soon returned to the denomination of his father. In 1895, McGuire joined the American Episcopal Church, quickly moved through a period of training and was ordained two years later in 1897.

It was his affiliation with the Episcopal church in the United States which exposed McGuire to the influences that would lead him to conceive of an ethnically singular church for Black persons. These influences were the theology of an Episcopal bishop, William Montgomery Brown of Arkansas, and the Black nationalism of the Marcus Garvey movement. The point will

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<sup>4</sup> The Moravian church originated in Germany in 1722 under Count N.L. Zinzendorf. An active missionary church, the Moravians sent church agents to the West Indies in 1732 (Cross, 1974: 938-939) as well as other parts of the, then remote, world (e.g. Labrador).

<sup>5</sup> White (1969: 109) claims that the Moravians saw themselves as "more a missionary movement than a denomination, and . . . [they had] a tendency to adopt the liturgy and customs of the of the predominant or established local church". Hence, it was acceptable for

be made that the influence of the Episcopal church was most important in the formation of the AOC despite some controversial objections to the contrary (e.g. Washington, 1972: 128).

The Episcopal Church of the United States had difficulty in deciding how to address the perceived problem of its Black congregants in the latter part of the 19th century and early 20th century. As an American church, the Episcopal denomination had to confront issues regarding the perceived racial superiority of Whites particularly within the church hierarchy (Newman, 1977: *iv*). The epitome of these prejudicial feelings were to be found in the work of Bishop Brown, under whom McGuire was sent to work in 1905 as the Archdeacon for Colored Work in the Arkansas diocese (Burkett, 1978a: 157)<sup>6</sup>.

Brown had some rather extreme views on race. He argued that the races should be separated for worship, since he considered the notion of Black and White people worshipping together to be a “nauseating theory” (White, 1969: 113). In support of this position he advocated the belief that a “God-implanted racial prejudice makes it impossible, absolutely so, that Afro-Americans and Anglo-Americans should ever occupy the same footing in a dual racial church” (White, 1969: 113). Brown proposed the “Arkansas Plan”, which involved the development of a separate Black Episcopal Church with its own bishops and clergy (Newman, 1977: *v*). These views should not be

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McGuire to have non-contradictory experiences within the two religious groups.

<sup>6</sup> It should be noted that there is some question about the decision to consecrate Brown. White (1969: 112) has suggested that Brown became bishop because he had written a “book on why everyone should be Episcopalian”, perhaps implying that Brown might not have

considered indicative of the entire Episcopal church; indeed, Bishop Brown was a rogue figure within the church hierarchy. He was eventually brought to trial for heresy, albeit on another matter<sup>7</sup>, and deposed by the Episcopal church in 1925 (White, 1969: 112).

Bishop Brown may have been an extreme example, but systemic racism did exist and was perpetuated by the hierarchy of the American Episcopal Church in the United States. It has already been indicated that the Episcopal hierarchy exhibited paternalistic attitudes towards Black members in their views on racial superiority (as did other Christian denominations at the time). There were difficulties, especially in some of the Southern dioceses, with regard to missionary work in newly emancipated Black communities in the post-Civil War era. The communities and the clergy feared that if they allowed Black members into their congregations it would be tantamount to claiming equality between the races - a step the church officials were not willing to take (Newman, 1977: *iv*). Despite these feelings, the Episcopal Church wanted to do missionary work within Black communities, perhaps because they were wary of church competition and they wanted to maintain their numbers. Missionary work was done under the auspices of 'Colored Work', a separate office since most Black clergy were not welcomed into the administration (Burkett, 1978a: 157-159). McGuire,

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otherwise been ready to fill such an office.

<sup>7</sup> Bishop Brown's error in the eyes of the church hierarchy was that he conceived of himself as an *episcopi vagantes*, a Latin phrase meaning wandering bishop and referring to bishops who have been excommunicated and "are in communion with no recognized see" (Cross,



for example, was denied the opportunity to address his annual report to the Diocesan Council of Arkansas despite his success in proselytizing within Black communities (Burkett, 1978a: 159). McGuire, then, had experienced first hand racism within a white ecclesiastical body. It was after this incident that McGuire began to articulate the belief that members of the Black and White communities could not worship together due to the racist attitudes present within the governing structures and the communities, especially those in the Southern states.

*The AOC and Links to the UNIA*

What this history has shown thus far is that McGuire was aware of the racism perpetuated by his beloved Episcopal Church. He is quoted as finding the prejudice he encountered to be disconcerting, as he had not experienced it in the West Indies:

Baptized in the Church of England, and reared in the West Indies, where there has existed no need for special or racial episcopal supervision . . . I failed to fully appreciate at first the necessity of this movement [for Black Episcopal bishops working in Black communities] (Burkett, 1978a: 159- 160).

He realized that this step was needed if the Episcopal tradition was to reach Black communities. McGuire then, had been exposed to the notion of a separate church for Black persons well before his association with the Black nationalism of Marcus Garvey and his Universal Negro Improvement

Association (UNIA). Newman (1977: *vi*) stated this position in the following manner:

McGuire almost certainly carried away from Arkansas the notion of a separate, autonomous black church, and one that was episcopal in character and structure, as one option for black religious self-determination and one avenue for achieving black independence.

Thus, in 1919, McGuire eventually joined the UNIA, a Black sovereignty movement, and was elected to the position of Chaplain-General at the International Convention of the Negro Peoples of the World in 1920. He was also given the title of the "titular Archbishop of Ethiopia" (Newman, 1977: *vii*; Burkett, 1978b: 29). His popularity may have stemmed from his oratorical style and the passion with which he called Whites "the most avaricious of races" (Burkett, 1978b: 76) and spoke directly to the racial pride of the members of the UNIA:

"The Uncle Tom nigger has got to go," he cried, "and his place must be taken by the new leader of the negro race. That man will not be a white man with a black heart, nor a black man with a white heart, but a black man with a black heart." At this the assembly jumped to its feet crying "Yes sir, yes sir" (Burkett, 1978b: 75).

McGuire was to give directions to the chaplains of the UNIA whose duty it was to "attend to the spiritual concerns of the members" (Burkett, 1978b: 29). He took this position quite seriously and within a year he had produced *The Universal Negro Ritual*, which included the protocol for all UNIA meetings and sections on baptism, marriage, and funeral rites. McGuire also tried to

implement a rule stating that all chaplains must be ordained ministers, although due to controversy surrounding this proposal the 'rule' was changed to state that the person had to have simply a reasonable knowledge of the Scriptures and *The Universal Negro Ritual* (Burkett, 1978b: 29, 30).

It was no secret that McGuire wanted to make this religious emphasis within the UNIA more formal with the creation of an official Black church tied to the organization. He felt his position as Chaplain-General and the title of 'titular Archbishop of Ethiopia' gave him the "mandate to establish and preside over a worldwide black church that was coterminous with the membership on the UNIA" (Newman, 1977: *xi*). He created the Independent Episcopal Church in 1920 while he was still affiliated with the UNIA in the hopes that it would appeal to Black Episcopalians in much the same way that Black Methodists were attracted to the African Methodist Episcopal Church. McGuire did not intend the Independent Episcopal Church to be mandatory for UNIA members (Newman, 1977: *vii*). Rather, he envisioned the UNIA as an ecumenical movement appealing to all Black persons, a notion even Marcus Garvey supported. An excerpt from an article in the *Negro World*, the UNIA's newspaper, shows support for the ecumenical movement: "he [McGuire] believes that unity does not necessarily mean uniformity in worship, and that the coming African or Ethiopian Church will be big enough for all Negroes to enter, *retaining their own worship* as Methodists, Baptists, Episcopalians, etc." (Burkett, 1978a: 162, emphasis added).

There were, however, difficulties with this approach. Although McGuire had left the Episcopal Church in 1919, several members of the UNIA were concerned that his vision of a church would be more akin to a 'neo-Anglican sect' than an actual ecumenical movement (Burkett, 1978a: 163). This concern was bolstered by the similarity between the *Universal Negro Ritual* and the Episcopal *Book of Common Prayer* (Burkett, 1978a: 163).

Some have suggested a direct link between the development of the African Orthodox Church (AOC) and the UNIA regardless of McGuire's experiences within the Episcopal church. Sernett (1985: 379) claimed that McGuire "linked his African Orthodox Church to the U.N.I.A."; Washington (1972: 128) believed that Garvey supported the creation of the AOC since he wanted to unite Black persons in a religious manner and his UNIA was not filling this need and Cronon (1968: 179), in a biography of Marcus Garvey, used the phrase "Garvey's African Orthodox Church". Winks (1971: 415) made a similar statement in his work *The Blacks in Canada*, when he commented on the "The pseudo-religious overtones of the UNIA and the secular preachings of its African Orthodox Church."

It was Archbishop Vincent Waterman of St. Philip's who first led me to question the claim of a direct relationship between the AOC and the UNIA. During an interview with the Archbishop, I asked about the connection

between the two organizations. He appeared to be annoyed at the suggestion and blamed the historian Robin Winks for perpetuating such a myth. It would seem that scholars have made the connection between the development of the AOC and the UNIA simply because McGuire was a key figure within both organizations; Watson (1995: 81) for example, claimed "The African Orthodox Church functioned as the spiritual mouthpiece of Garveyism."

In making this connection, however, many important details are lost and some seem to be ignored. The idea for a Black church originated in McGuire's affiliation with the American Episcopal Church. My review of the historical literature indicates it was only with the UNIA that this idea became tenable. Within the UNIA, McGuire had a forum for his beliefs, an audience sympathetic to those beliefs and the resources to make such a venture viable. It was the connections that he made within the organization which enabled him to make the leap from simply discussing the possibility of his vision of a Black church to its actual foundation. Another reason for the establishment of the AOC is that the UNIA - with its emphasis on racial pride and its programs - had a positive effect on McGuire. Perhaps McGuire took Marcus Garvey's notion of the 'Black man doing it for himself' to heart and felt it was the time for an all-Black church to complement the steps being taken in the secular world<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> Garvey, for example, started the Black Star Line of Delaware, a shipping company owned

What is missing from previous analyses on the AOC's origins (which look only to the Marcus Garvey Movement) are the statements made by members of the UNIA regarding the AOC and the treatment of McGuire after the church was founded. It is true that Garvey wanted his members to worship a 'Black' God. "It is really logical that although we all know God is a spirit, yet all religions more or less visualize Him in a likeness akin to their own race . . . Hence it was most vital that pictures of God should be in the likeness of the [Negro] [sic] race" (Garvey quoted in Cronon, 1968: 178). While Garvey supported the notion of a Black church, he certainly did not want the AOC to be the official church of the UNIA. The following quote, from an article in the *Negro World* under the headline "U.N.I.A. Favors All Churches, But Adopts None as U.N.I.A. Church", illustrates that not all Marcus Garvey movement members were pleased with McGuire's creation:

I [the Assistant President General] want it to be distinctly understood, that the U.N.I.A. is not a church, and it does not intend to be one . . . there will be no church connected with the U.N.I.A. . . . We favor all churches, but adopt none as a U.N.I.A. Church. Let the presidents and officers of the various locals take notice and govern themselves accordingly" (in Newman, 1977: xi).

The article does not make specific reference to the AOC, but one can assume that it was this particular church causing strife within the UNIA in regards to religious matters.

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and operated by Black persons. Its charter allowed it to "own, charter operate, and navigate ships of various types in any part of the world and to carry passengers, freight, and mails"

While both Garvey and McGuire evidently remained convinced that the image of a Black God was liberating for the Black community, Garvey was not ready to support the creation of a distinct church affiliated with the UNIA. His concerns could be labeled pragmatic. In 1921, the UNIA was in its infancy and any divisions may have been devastating to a new organization. In accepting the AOC as the official church of the UNIA, Marcus Garvey was concerned he would be alienating members of other denominations who did not want to join the AOC. A lifelong member of the Baptist church, for example, might have difficulty in reconciling a change in beliefs and ritual even though they promoted racial pride. Garvey did not want his members to feel obliged to join the AOC just to be members of the UNIA. In short, he did not want his racial movement to be divisive within the Black community (Burkett, 1978a: 164).

Further evidence for the AOC's singular association with McGuire can be seen in the politics of the UNIA. If the AOC had close ties to the UNIA, like some have claimed, then it might assumed McGuire would have received accolades for his work. Such was not the case. After the establishment of the AOC, McGuire was, in fact, forced to resign his position as Chaplain-General an example of his alienation from the UNIA (Newman, 1977: *xii*). Moreover, the members of the UNIA wanted little contact with McGuire; he was considered a "traitor' to the race" and denounced on the floor of Liberty Hall

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(Cronon, 1968: 50). This interesting initiative failed to be a viable commercial success.

(Burkett, 1978a: 164). McGuire was permitted to re-join the UNIA in 1924 as Honorary Chaplain-General, but only after he had affirmed the separate nature of his AOC from the UNIA. It should be noted that despite the struggles between them, Marcus Garvey respected McGuire. When Garvey was convicted of mail fraud and a potential successor was needed for the UNIA, McGuire's name was mentioned (Newman, 1977: *xii*).

The AOC, then, did not find its roots in the UNIA movement and Marcus Garvey. Rather, it was the early 20th century American Episcopal Church, politically and theologically, that most influenced McGuire. While the UNIA's slogan was "One Aim! One God! One Destiny!" (Cronon, 1968: 170), it did not accept the work of McGuire as beneficial to the organization. The words of Gavin White summarize this history of the relationship between the AOC and the UNIA: "The African Orthodox Church was McGuire's work and not Garvey's" (White, 1969: 132).

One should not infer from these statements that there was no continuity between the members of the UNIA and those people who made the decision to attend the AOC. Such a connection is not only reasonable it is logical. The members of the UNIA had strong racial consciousness so it would only seem fitting for them to join a church wherein the same appreciation for ethnicity was to be found. As Chapter Five will show, the West Indian community in Whitney Pier maintained its ties to the UNIA.



*The AOC and the American Catholic Church*

McGuire and the AOC had difficulty within the UNIA but the church's problems did not cease with McGuire's resignation from the organization. Another source of contention was with the American Catholic Church (ACC). Before discussing the problems with the succession it is useful to see the connection between the Eastern Orthodox Church, the Syrian Church, the ACC and the AOC.

The split of the Catholic Church into the Eastern Orthodox churches and the Roman church was finalized in 1054, although tensions had been building between the two groups since 500 - 600 CE. The Orthodox Church does not recognize as ecumenical any church council after the Council of Nicea in 787 CE. The Eastern Orthodox Church has four original Patriarchates including Constantinople, Alexandria, Jerusalem and Antioch (Cross, 1974: 1012-1014)

The Syrian Orthodox Church is descended from the Patriarchate of Antioch. The Syrian church appeared with its own identity due to theological differences as early as the 6th century, although later they were considered 'Orthodox' (Cross, 1974: 1334-1335). A member of the Syrian Orthodox Church in South India, the Metropolitan of Malabar, consecrated Bishop Vilatte in 1891 (Terry-Thompson, 1956: 12). Vilatte in turn went back to the United States and formed the American Catholic Church.

Despite the fact that most theological bodies have accepted the consecration of Bishop Vilatte, there is still debate as to the place of the AOC within the Orthodox tradition. The church, for example, has not adopted the Julian calendar and it celebrates holidays and feast days according to the Gregorian calendar. Most notably, the AOC celebrates Christmas according to the Roman Catholic tradition. Church leaders within the AOC claim that they are part of the Eastern Orthodox fold because they have rejected the 'Filioque'<sup>9</sup> of Western Christianity and they follow the doctrines of the Eastern Orthodox church in regards to such items as transubstantiation and the reverence of icons (see Terry-Thompson, 1956: 44 for the complete doctrine). The theology of the church and its valid connection to the Eastern Orthodox Christian tradition is protected adamantly by the church. Stating his position on the validity of the succession, and its impact on the AOC, Canon Angel Costoso Vargas (1985: 3) claimed, "[w]ithout question, our orders are valid. So this is our legacy which we must guard zealously."

Comments surrounding the church's right to consider themselves part of the Orthodox tradition are to be contrasted with the Orthodox scholar Timothy Ware's ([1963] 1993: 189) statement "the 'African Orthodox Church' which, though using the title 'Orthodox', has in fact no connection with the

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<sup>9</sup> The "Filioque" controversy caused the split of the Eastern and Western Churches in 1054 (Armstrong, 1993: 199-201). The controversy centered on the Holy Spirit and the question of its procession from the First (the Father) or the Second (the Son) persons of the Trinity. The Eastern tradition believed that the Holy Spirit proceeded directly from the Father (Gill, 1967: 913-914; Hardon, 1980: 212). This is in fact what is implied in the Nicene Creed (325 CE). The 'double procession' of the Spirit through the Father *and* Son (hence 'Filioque' or

true and historical Orthodox communion". It is not the intent of this thesis to engage in arguments surrounding the theology of this church, suffice it to say there are debates surrounding the claim of Orthodoxy by the AOC.

The head of the ACC, Bishop Rene Vilatte, consecrated McGuire as a bishop on September 21, 1921 (Terry-Thompson, 1956: 42). Several other churches have claimed succession through Bishop Vilatte, such as the Apostolic Catholic Church of America ([members.aol.com/apcathch/page\\_life\\_and\\_spirit.html](http://members.aol.com/apcathch/page_life_and_spirit.html): Feb. 1998), the Orthodox Catholic Church of America ([webcom.com/sghp/vilatte.html](http://webcom.com/sghp/vilatte.html): Feb. 1998), the Church of the Culdees ([continent.com/culdee/ap.html](http://continent.com/culdee/ap.html): Feb.1998) and the Christian Catholic Community ([netministries.org/see/churches/ch01617?frame=N](http://netministries.org/see/churches/ch01617?frame=N): Feb. 1998). The theology of episcopal succession and the exact differences between the various churches and denominations involved are admittedly confusing but a brief history of Vilatte's relationship with them is necessary<sup>10</sup>.

The crux of the controversy surrounding Bishop Vilatte was the validity of his consecration by Archbishop Alvarez Julius I in 1889 (Terry-Thompson, 1956: 14-15, 27). There were questions regarding the person who consecrated Julius I and whether he had the authority to conduct the rite. This discrepancy was cleared up by a church official who stated "it was not the consecrator of Mar Julius Alvarez that received consecration before

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'and the son') does not appear until the Third Council of Toledo in 589.

<sup>10</sup> For a more complete, although potentially biased account, see A.C. Terry-Thompson (1956) *History of the African Orthodox Church*. This book contains the church documents which provide the evidence for the validity of the consecration of Rene Vilatte and George McGuire.

getting himself ordained priest, but it was another Athanasius" (Terry-Thompson, 1956: 17). Only after several letters were exchanged between officials within the Syrian Church, and certificates proving Vilatte's valid consecration circulated did the matter finally subside (Terry-Thompson, 1956: 7-39). The Eastern head of the Orthodox Church, His Holiness Ignatius Peter III, stated in a Bull, "We, the humble servants of God, hereby allow the consecration by the Holy Ghost of the Priest Rene Vilatte, elected for the Archbishopal dignity" (Terry-Thompson, 1956: 18). Since the consecration of Vilatte was considered valid by the Eastern Orthodox Church, any bishops consecrated by Vilatte would be considered valid in the eyes of this church. Patriarch McGuire's consecration, then, is deemed valid in terms of the Eastern Orthodox Church.

This section has given the reader an analysis of the history of the AOC including a discussion illustrating that the role of the UNIA is less important than has been reported in some texts. The reader has also been introduced to the issue of adherence to orthodox beliefs within the AOC and problems surrounding their theology. This is a complicated history, but important nonetheless as one seeks to place the AOC (and by extension, St. Philip's, Sydney) into an appropriate theological perspective. I now proceed to a description of the place of Whitney Pier, the area in Sydney where St. Philip's is located, in order to sketch the sociology of the parish setting.

## Chapter Four

### Description of the Place, Community and the Church

Whitney Pier is a community within the city of Sydney, Nova Scotia but it has no definite boundary, i.e. there is no official designation that a place called “the Pier” exists<sup>1</sup>. If one were, however, to ask a resident of Sydney where the Pier was, the response would probably be “over the Overpass”. While Whitney Pier may not exist on an official map, it does connote a general area with the people of Sydney, and especially with people from the actual Pier itself. The people who are from the Pier have a strong sense of belonging to a community, a feeling bolstered, perhaps, by its location. One person summarized his feelings about the Pier in the following manner: “[g]eographically, Whitney Pier is just part of the map of Sydney, Nova Scotia. To me it is a feeling I have in my chest, an emotional and sensuous warming that I always feel when I am in Whitney Pier or someone asks a question about my birthplace” (Whitney Pier Historical Society, 1993: i). From this quote, the Pier is obviously much more than a collection of streets - it is a significant part of peoples’ identity. In this section of the thesis, I intend to familiarize the reader with the area immediately surrounding St. Philip’s as well as the physical structure and layout of the church itself. In reading about this place, it is my hope the reader will get a sense of Whitney Pier and begin to understand its real and perceived

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<sup>1</sup> The post office in Whitney Pier was once labelled as such but now it is simply called Post Office 1191.

separation from the city.

### *Description of the Place*

Whitney Pier is not just another Sydney neighbourhood. On entering the Pier, one is aware of going into a distinctly different area. The most visible dividing element separating the Pier from the larger community of Sydney is a large overpass. Even before passing over this landmark, one can see differences between the two communities. On Victoria Road, the road connecting the Pier and Sydney, is a stretch of company houses built in a duplex style in the early half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century for the workers at the Steel Plant, now called the Sydney Steel Corporation (SYSCO). Most of these houses are now run down: neighbours have painted their respective sides of the dwelling in different colours or have changed the original wood shingles to aluminum siding. The wood finishes are victims of peeling paint, there are often old, abandoned cars in the back yards of these homes, and children's toys are often left out in the rain.

After travelling through this row of houses, one comes to the overpass. This connects Sydney to the Pier over the Steel Plant and the former Coke Ovens property, replacing an original and inefficient street car system (Whitney Pier Historical Society, 1993). Driving across the bridge greatly reinforces the idea that one is going into a completely different part of Sydney. On the left hand side of the overpass, one can see the Steel Plant buildings, not all of which have been maintained since the plant's

modernization in the mid-1980s. There are buildings with gaping holes in the roofs, abandoned rail cars, rusting buildings, and the unattractive sight of a large tract of industrial land. The view from the right hand side is not much better; it is the site of the now-closed Coke Ovens, a coal processing plant. There is the remnant of a building that was supposed to be blown up and taken away. This project has not advanced past the partial demolition phase and now there is only the skeleton of a large rusting building on its side<sup>2</sup>. After this there is a brook that leads from the Coke Ovens to the Tar Ponds, one of the worst toxic waste site in Canada. The water in this brook looks closer to sludge than real water<sup>3</sup>. One of the people interviewed for this study told me of a time when they were trying to conduct soil tests of the brook bed and they brought in a backhoe to take deep soil samples. The basket of the backhoe was almost sucked into the sludge it was so deep and thick and they had to abandon the project.

The next sight one sees is a large cylindrical container perhaps fifty feet high and across. This cylinder has been the object of some graffiti, the most telling of which is the epithet "Welcome to tha HOOD" written on it in large spray-painted letters. Between the Coke Ovens and the Pier there is also a system of above-ground pipe lines that are no longer used and are

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<sup>2</sup> This structure was immortalized in the video for the song "Trust Yourself" by the Canadian band Blue Rodeo which was on their 1990 album, *Casino*.

<sup>3</sup> The Tar Pond, formerly known as Muggah's Creek is the result of decades of runoff from the Coke Ovens and Steel Plant. Polluting this waterway that empties into Sydney Harbour and the Atlantic Ocean are PCB's (polychlorinated biphenyls) and PAH's (poly aromatic hydrocarbons) which are believed to be cancer-causing agents. Most people in Sydney believe that the Tar Ponds are the reason for the high rate of cancer in Sydney but it has never been adequately studied, despite several recent attempts by various

rusting in the salt air. Connecting these areas are swaths of grass that look like wheat by early summer because they are so high. Past the industrial sites there are a number of houses, most of which are dilapidated much more so than the company houses on the Sydney side of the overpass. The paint on these homes has faded, the eaves have rotted away in sections, and there are places where the roofs have started to cave in, suggesting problems with the framing of the building or instability of the ground due to the mining of coal seams.

### *Social Description of the Sydney Area*

The reader now has a visual sense of what the community of Whitney Pier looks like, but it is even more important to provide a social description of the area. Information on the 1991 census tract of Whitney Pier was not available during the research process but reliable data was available on the City of Sydney and it will be these statistics which provide a portion of the social description of the area.

In 1991, Sydney had a population of 26,065 making it the third largest city in Nova Scotia. This figure represents a decrease of 6.1% from 1986 (1991 Census, Area Profiles Part A: 24). As was discussed by many of the participants in this study, Whitney Pier may have experienced a similar drop in population when many of its young people have moved to other parts of Canada and the United States to find employment. "Because of the work situation, they will leave and go wherever, Boston, New York, Philadelphia"



(Archbishop Waterman).

The lack of work and chronic unemployment highlights the necessity for the people of Sydney, especially the youth, to leave the area. The 1991 unemployment rate for people aged 15-24 was 33%, double the rate for those 25 and over (15.2%) (1991 Census Area Profiles, Area Profiles Part B: 34). The unemployment level for Canada for youth in these two age groups at the same time period were 15.5% and 9% respectively. While the unemployment figures for Sydney are quite high, they are much higher in the Black community of Whitney Pier. According to several participants in this study, there are few Black residents who have obtained employment in the area. "If you go down to the stores and look at the clerks, you don't see very many Blacks" (John). "There is no work for Black people" (James). This feeling within the community is supported by figures reported in the 1996 *Task Force on Government Services to the Nova Scotian Black Community*, which stated that the unemployment rate in Black communities is between 85% and 95%.

The socio-economic status of the City of Sydney, as measured by mean income, is slightly higher than in the rest of Cape Breton County. The mean household income in 1991 was \$34 930.00. This figure compares to \$31,266 in New Waterford, \$32,076 in North Sydney, and \$31,626 in Sydney Mines. Given the reported pattern of chronic unemployment in Whitney Pier among its Black population, one can assume these income figures are not indicative

of the lifestyle of these particular residents, most of whose annual incomes are much lower. The percentage of households classified as low-income also speaks to the socio-economic status of the city<sup>4</sup>. Although 23.4% of all households in Sydney are deemed low-income, other communities in Cape Breton County have a higher rate. In Glace Bay, for example, the percentage of low income households is 26.2%.

The population of Sydney follows definite ethnic patterns. Of those people stating a single ethnic origin for the census, 12,225 claim British origins, just under half of the city's population. Of the city's 26,000 inhabitants, only 380 people indicated single Black origins (1991 Census, Area Profiles Part B: 32). The number of Black persons is higher in Sydney but many are subsumed under the category of "multiple origins" which does not contain a more detailed description of the origins.

The religious affiliation of Sydney is predominantly Roman Catholic with 15,225 people claiming membership in this denomination. This represents over one half of the city's population and is nearly double the number of Protestants (8,485) (1991 Census, Area Profiles Part B: 32). Only 370 people claim affiliation with "other religions", which presumably includes the African Orthodox Church.

### *The Church*

St. Philip's is located only two streets past the overpass which connects

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<sup>4</sup>Low income households refers to families who are below the low- income cutoffs for this area and spend 70% or more of their income on basic necessities: food, shelter, and clothing.

Sydney to Whitney Pier, so it is located firmly within the area that was populated by Black immigrants at the turn of the century. The church is situated on a large lot with one half of the lot serving as a churchyard. It is in this large grassy yard that the parish's popular annual Caribbean festival is held every August during Sydney's Action Week<sup>5</sup>. The yard is fenced in with green garden fencing and is about waist height on the average adult. Most of the shrubbery that used to be present along the back of the fence has been cut down in the past two years, a project that was undertaken by the person who owned the adjoining residential property. The yard now looks tidier toward the back but the view that was opened up with the removal of this shrubbery is of the Coke Ovens property.

The church building is a simple, white-shingled, wooden structure which was owned originally by the Dominion Iron and Steel Company (DISCO) and was used as a storage area (Beaton, 1984: 93). The building was sold to the church for the token fee of one dollar in 1926 but it had to be transported from the steel plant to its present site. The company arranged for the building to be moved by rail car although it was the responsibility of the congregants and any other volunteer labourer to dismantle and move the building from the rail tracks to its present location, a distance of approximately three blocks. Beaton states that the entire process of dismantling, moving, and reconstruction took approximately one week (Beaton, 1984: 93). The church was officially consecrated on July 12, 1928.

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<sup>5</sup> Action Week is Sydney's annual community celebration that was held during the first week of August.

The outside of the church has four large “pointed’ or gothic-shaped windows” (Beaton, 1984: 93) with stained glass panels on each side. The steeple of St. Philip’s is enclosed and houses a bell tower that also came from the Steel Plant. The front of the steeple area extends down the middle of the front of the church to the entrance. It is adorned with an Eastern cross; a placard listing the times of worship, the AOC’s motto, “*In tenebris lumen*”<sup>6</sup> and the statement “All are Welcome”; and there is a plaque from Heritage Canada designating the building a heritage property. On the left hand side of the main entrance is a wheel chair ramp, although during my field visits, no one was ever seen using it. The ramp and the steps are painted a burgundy-maroon colour and the walkway is covered with green astro turf. On the rise of the top step there is a hole cut in the astro turf with the date of incorporation of the church.

When one walks into the church there is a small foyer with a coat rack, a notice board, the bell rope, the baptismal font, and a doorway separating this area from the inside of the church. To the right of the doorway, the back wall of the church is decorated with marble tablets listing the names of church elders and on the left there is a guest book. On the left-hand side of the doorway there is a table with several types of hymnals and copies of the liturgy. Before this table there is an entrance way leading to the basement. On this wall there are several newspaper clippings describing the community and people within the church. There is also a children’s drawing done in

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<sup>6</sup> “Out of the darkness comes light.”

marking pen of a stick figure with the inscription "I Love you Father Waterman".

There are twelve pews on the right hand side and seven more on the left, all of which are made from dark hardwood. There was a balcony within the church to accommodate more worshippers, but it was converted into an office in the 1980's as the membership declined. It is interesting to note that each person who regularly attends has their own 'spot', and when there is a particularly busy service, e.g. Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve, there some confusion as to who will sit where. To remedy this situation, people usually sit as close to where they normally sit or arrive particularly early to claim their pew.

The liturgical items within the church are quite simple yet compatible with the comfortable ambience of the church. On the walls around the pews there are framed pictures of the Stations of the Cross. The altar area is enclosed by a communion rail constructed of simple aluminum pipes with a two-paneled lattice gate as the entrance. On the left-hand side of this gate is a slot where the large Eastern Cross is placed during the Mass by the altar girl. There is also a small pulpit on this side where the Deacon gives the reading from the gospel. Along the back wall is the altar and is on a platform slightly higher than the church floor. The Bible is placed on this altar along with the Divine Liturgy of the African Orthodox Church. There are usually seasonal flowers placed by the church on the altar, and a tabernacle which

contains wine, the chalice, and communion wafers. The tabernacle is white and decorated with items that can be found in local craft stores. In front of the altar there are two tall kerosene 'candles', one of which is a handle for the incense burner. On the right hand side of the altar there is a raised pulpit from which the Archbishop delivers his sermon. Attached to this is a microphone linked to the church's public address system.

The back wall of the church is decorated with tapestries celebrating both the history of St. Philip's and the Whitney Pier community. There is a painting commemorating the bicentennial of Sydney in 1985 with various faces depicting the history of Sydney and the two other ethnic churches in the area (St. Mary's Polish Church and the Holy Ghost Ukrainian Catholic church). The other tapestry is in honour of a recent anniversary of St. Philip's. Another picture on the wall is one of Father Francis, the former priest who served St. Philip's for over forty years. Listed underneath the picture of Father Francis are the years of his service to the church, 1940-1982.

Below the church is a full basement with kitchen facilities, completely accessible from the worship area. The basement can also be reached from a side door that opens into the churchyard. Bingo games and teas are held in here and in the kitchen they serve their locally-celebrated Caribbean chicken and rice and chilli dinners for the parish and community. The Altar Guild hosts a weekly Bingo game as well as teas for several special occasions

throughout the year (e.g. Easter, Mother's Day). Like the Caribbean festival, these events are attended by people who are not members of St. Philip's. Bingo is particularly popular with the women in the neighbourhood, although the church does not advertise it within the community. When the person who organized the games cancelled it for a few months because she was tired, people phoned her so many times asking when bingo would return that she had to bring it back.

### *Worship*

Mass begins at 11:00am on Sunday morning, 10:00am during the summer months, with a traditional Orthodox procession from the altar to the back doorway led by the altar girl carrying a large Eastern Cross, followed by the deacon, the choir and the Archbishop. When they reach the back of the church, the Archbishop says a prayer and after this they make their way to the front of the church with a hymn that is sung by the choir and the congregation. Ritual is emphasized in the Mass and the congregation is expected to fully participate. If the volume of the worship decreases, the organist, the Archbishop's wife, will raise her voice in an effort to get people more involved. There is a reading from the gospel by the deacon, chanting of sections of the liturgy, and a sermon by the Archbishop.

It should be noted that much of the speaking done by the Archbishop from the altar is done with his back to the congregation, following Orthodox ritual. The mass is a combination of several styles. It appears to be an

amalgam of the High Anglican mass, but I was told it also has elements from the Roman Catholic and the Orthodox tradition. The congregation and the Archbishop recite a version of the Nicene creed adapted for use in the African Orthodox Church. The creed is sung with much formality.

The notices are read each week by the same lay reader and this occurs in the middle of the service. The lay reader is a woman who has been affiliated with church all of her life as a member of one of the church's founding families. Contained in the notices are requests for prayers for those who are sick, those who have died and well wishes for those who are celebrating birthdays or are travelling. These notices serve as a reminder for upcoming events in the church. She also communicates any letters to the congregation from other churches or organizations as well as delivering the 'thought for the week' based on a Bible passage.

Singing is a very important element of the church service. Indeed, one woman in the choir said she would leave the church if the choir were to stop. There are up to five hymns in most services which include the Processional and Recessional. The hymns appear familiar to anyone who follows an Anglican religious tradition. Several factors go into the decision as to which hymns will be sung on a particular Sunday. There are suggested hymns that coincide with the church calendar and the reading of the gospel and epistle. If the community has suffered a tragedy, however, or some other crisis, appropriate music is chosen. Conversely, if there is good news within the



community, then this mood will be reflected in the hymns. The organist and clergy are also sensitive to the emotions of the congregation in the selection of hymns. If they realize that someone is having difficulty with a hymn because it touches on a personal circumstance or concern then they will change the hymn.

St. Philip's choir is small, consisting of three adults and an organist. It should be noted it is not only the choir that sings, but the entire congregation joins in. The singing that occurs in St. Philip's is not the type that one hears in some larger churches where many people simply move their lips, if they even sing at all. In this church, people are not worried about singing off-key or out of tune; rather, they are more concerned with raising their voices in song and fully participating in the mass. It should be noted that the congregation of St. Philip's does not engage in hand-clapping, shouting or other forms of active worship during the Mass even though these actions are common in other Black congregations (Williams, 1974: 51-52, Nelson, 1996: 381-388). Henry (1973: 121) has noted that services in Nova Scotia, Black Baptist congregations are "not characterized by emotional experiential fundamentalism."

Communion is given each week when the Archbishop is present<sup>7</sup>. The communion wafers and wine are blessed by him with incense and prayers<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> If the Archbishop or a priest is not present to conduct the Mass and give Communion, then the church has in place a system of lay readers to conduct an antecomunion, a service without actual communion. This often happened in the beginnings of the church when they did not have permanent priest (see the *Negro Churchman* for details)

<sup>8</sup> The African Orthodox Church believes in the doctrine of Transubstantiation, that is the wafer and wine

The congregation, beginning with the choir, then lines up pew by pew in front of the communion rail to receive communion. The priest dips the wafer into the wine and places it in the parishioners' mouth. If there are children, he will give them communion but will omit the wine. The Archbishop is adamant in giving everyone communion, especially if they are new to the congregation or visiting the area. The first time this researcher went to the church, I did not feel it was my place to accept communion since St. Philip's was not my church. The Archbishop repeated over and over "All are welcome". This scene was replayed in another field visit when a newspaper reporter came to do a story on the church and she was not going to partake of communion. The Archbishop wants everyone in the church to feel welcome and part of the church regardless of their faith or traditions. This is one more way, and perhaps it is the most important way, that he extends his hand in welcome. In this gesture, he is showing the newcomer they are accepted by the church.

A new element has been added to the ritual of Sunday mass at St. Philip's in the past year. After the Archbishop's sermon, the congregation joins hands in the aisle and recites the Lord's Prayer. For the lines, "For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory", the congregation raises their hands. One member, in an interview for the provincial paper, claimed that this act, "To a stranger . . . it makes you feel relaxed . . . It's nice" (Camus, 1998). When asked the reason this practice was adopted, the

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are believed to turn into the actual body and blood of Christ.

Archbishop stated that “by holding hands, joining, we want to feel that human beings become one unit to make the world a better place. . . . For that length of time there are powers in numbers”. This shows St. Philip’s is trying new approaches to worship quite similar to Protestant faiths. St. Philip’s is changing better meet the needs of its congregation.

The service ends with a procession that follows the same order as the entry, out of the church. The service ends with a brief reading from the Bible by one of the choir members and with a “Hail Mary” votive. People rarely rush out of the church after the service. They stay and talk to each other and the Archbishop. This seems to be a very important part of the service for most, as they take time to re-connect with other people.

Up to this point, I have given a physical and sociological description of Whitney Pier, and provided some observations concerning the church, its parish social activities, the worship, and the Archbishop’s role. One note must be made about the style of leadership practiced by the Archbishop. It can be said that the Archbishop and his wife ostensibly run the parish of St. Philip’s. One could use the notion of charisma as discussed by Weber to illuminate the Archbishop’s role. For Weber, charisma was “a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is considered extraordinary and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers and qualities (cited in Miyahara, 1983: 370). Weber subdivided the notion of charisma into several categories, including

magical, prophetic and routinized (Miyahara, 1983: 368). The category most useful in the context of this thesis is the notion of a “priestly” charisma, a further category in the prophetic category. In this case, the person’s authority or charisma comes not necessarily from any personal quality but rather by virtue of the office they hold. “[T]he priest . . . dispenses salvation by virtue of his office. Even in cases in which personal charisma may be involved, *it is the hierarchical office that confers legitimate authority upon the priest as a member of an organized enterprise of salvation*” (Weber cited in Miyahara, 1983: 369, my emphasis).

The people who attend St. Philip’s may respond to the Archbishop as a person with charismatic qualities but they also acknowledge his position as a priest and Archbishop and the power that entails. It was clear from the interviews and watching members of the congregation interact with the Archbishop they all have a deep respect for his leadership because of his position within St. Philip’s. He is their priest and he is there to guide them. This situation should not lead the reader to conclude the congregation of St. Philip’s blindly accepts dictates from the Archbishop. Rather, it is simply a recognition of the community’s acceptance of Archbishop Waterman’s leadership due in part to his status as the priest and archbishop of the church.

I now turn to a historical review of St. Philip’s, tracing its origins and associations with its parent, the African Orthodox Church, and reviewing

reasons for why this denomination settled in a relatively remote part of Nova Scotia.

## **Chapter Five**

### **Analysis of the Historical Development of the Church in Sydney**

This section of the data analysis attempts to answer the question of why St. Philip's African Orthodox Church is unique in Nova Scotia from an historical perspective. This question will be answered by examining the impetus for the church coming to Sydney and the existing social conditions in the area at this time.

#### *Origins in Sydney*

St. Philip's AOC has been a part of the religious landscape of Sydney, Nova Scotia since 1921 when a West Indian steelworker put in a request to the AOC's New York headquarters for a priest (Beaton, 1988: 120). There was no history of the church in the community before this call, nor were there any members of the church in Canada. It is not known how this individual knew about the existence of the AOC in the United States, or if there was support from within Sydney's Black community for his initiative. The AOC, however, claims that its expansion into Canada and Sydney was the result of proselytizing efforts on its part when a priest was sent at the request of Patriarch George Alexander McGuire (Terry-Thompson, 1956: 100). It is not known who came first - did McGuire send someone to Sydney when he knew there was a potentially willing congregation, or did the church engage in active proselytizing in new communities? Unfortunately, questions like this are difficult to answer given the limited resources regarding both the AOC's history and

the local history of this particular congregation.

Ethnic churches in Whitney Pier were quite common in the early part of the twentieth century as many immigrant groups brought their own religious tradition to their new homeland. Beaton-Planetta (1984: 89) claimed that there were seven distinct ethnic churches in Whitney Pier in the early part of the 20th century. For example, these included a Hungarian church, an Italian church, St. George's Russian/Ukrainian Orthodox Church, and the Adath Israel Congregation, which served the Jewish community of Whitney Pier (WPHS, 1993: 40-51). Of the many ethnic congregations that existed at the turn of the century, only three remain in Whitney Pier today: St. Philip's AOC, St. Mary's Polish Catholic Church, and the Holy Ghost Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church.

Most churches in immigrant communities developed because the people took their churches with them, not as a result of missions from church groups coming to them. It was a way in which immigrants could maintain links with the old country and forge a sense of community with other people new to this country. "Religious affiliation was one of the most significant factors of ethnic continuity for the immigrants who came to Sydney, Nova Scotia at the turn of the century" (Beaton- Planetta, 1984: 89). The Polish community, for example, transplanted their church from Poland to the Pier with help from *Towarzystwo Chrystusa*, an Order that serves the religious needs of Poles abroad (Mullan, 1998). In a study of

American Polish immigrants, Thomas and Znaniecki (quoted in Marty, 1986: 139) claimed that the Polish parishes were “simply the old primary community, reorganized and concentrated” and “in its concrete totality, it is a substitute for both the narrower but more coherent village-group and the wider but more diffuse and vaguely outlined *okolica*”<sup>1</sup>. The parish was clearly a way in which to maintain continuity with the old country and a place to experience a sense of community with people from the same ethnic group.

All immigrant groups who came to Whitney Pier, then, had a central cultural and religious tradition from which to draw upon. The West Indians who came to Sydney shared only their ethnicity. Geographically, politically, and even religiously they came from a variety of countries (Barbados, Antigua, Cuba, etc.) and a variety of religious traditions (Methodist, Anglican, Jehovah’s Witness). This is not to suggest that they did not share cultural ties. Rather it is to simply recognize that the islands of the West Indies did not constitute a *de facto* country or identity. It is a logical stance, then, to assume that to foster community bonds the immigrants needed a ‘neutral’ church to accommodate all of the people’s needs. The AOC was a new church, and as such it would be in a better position to transcend denominational bias. People who were Methodist in Barbados, for example, might find it easier to justify going to a new AOC church versus an Anglican Church.

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<sup>1</sup> *Okolica* is a Polish word meaning extended household, community.



### *Racism*

The community's experiences with racism also precipitated the need for an ethnic church. The West Indians faced racism from the moment they decided to immigrate to Canada in the 1910's. The Canadian Immigration office under W. D. Scott held strong views on who they considered acceptable immigrants to Canada and Black persons were not on their list (Schultz, 1988; Sessing, 1970). Initially their policies were implemented to keep out American Black persons who they considered to be an "unfit class of settlers" (Schultz, 1988: 258). It was believed that "His [the American Black] loose habits, laziness, sexual appetities (sic), lack of manliness, and mental deficiencies would pollute the pure stream of Canadian morals" (Schultz, 1988: 258)<sup>2</sup>. The West Indians were not excluded from these perceived identifications, but the immigration officials finally acquiesced and even allowed that West Indian Blacks were "'well-behaved, well-dressed, and well-spoken' and were not a burden on the public welfare system" (WPHS, 1993: 16). This, coupled with the need for cheap labor at the Sydney steel plant, outweighed the racist views of a public official and West Indians in due course were admitted into Canada (WPHS, 1993: 12).

According to historical accounts from the early 20th century, once they were in Canada, the West Indians still had to face incidents of

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<sup>2</sup> For a discussion on the fear of Black sexuality and the fear of 'polluting' the racial lines, see Davis' (1991) work, *Who is Black*.

racism. These extended into the various churches in the area. For example, some Whites in Holy Redeemer, a Roman Catholic Church in Whitney Pier, would not sit next to Black residents. It was in the Anglican Church, however, where most of the incidences of racism occurred. Here, the West Indians were told that they would have to rent their own pews if they wanted to sit in the church. But they were then told that there were no more pews available! As well, the Anglican priest, about 1910, would not conduct the burial rites for a Black man. An Anglican priest in Whitney Pier, in a decision akin to the division along colour lines that was established earlier in the American Episcopal tradition (*Supra*, 42-43) wanted to bring in a West Indian Anglican minister to attend to the needs of the Black community (Beaton-Planetta, 1984: 92; Beaton, 1988: 115-118; cf. Newman, 1977, v; Burkett, 1978: 157-159). One member of the AOC church interviewed for this research project mentioned the experience of racism in the Anglican church as one of the reasons why his parents initially joined the church. His father was told to "find some place to bury your dead and marry your wife" (John). He tempered this claim by stating that he did not see discrimination in the churches of Whitney Pier today.

Given these factors then, the need for a new church to address a diverse community and the racism within the existing religious institutions in Sydney and the surrounding communities is one of the

main reasons the AOC developed in Sydney. The church was established to address specific issues within the Black community in Whitney Pier. How did this church attract its members when other predominately Black churches, like the African Methodist Episcopal Church, a well- established church in other parts of Canada, did not attract members? This issue will be addressed in terms of the theology of the AOC church and the role of ethnic identity in the church.

*Reasons for Affiliation with St. Philip's*

The theology of the AOC was not delivered to its congregations in a complete form when the denomination was formed in 1921. Interestingly, it was in the pages of the *Negro Churchman* that the theology of the AOC was slowly developed and expanded upon for the followers. It listed items on such themes as the catechism and the church's stand on important theological issues, and it produced a summary of the various theological points that were to be considered heretical to the Eastern Orthodox tradition. Although they were drawing on the Orthodox tradition, and therefore claimed to reject the 'Filioque' of Western Christianity, one can still see the influence of the Anglican church on the AOC (Beaton, 1988)<sup>3</sup>. One influential member of the AOC has recently described the church as a blend of Protestant and Roman Catholic traditions. The liturgy of the

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<sup>3</sup> There has been a long tradition of cooperation between the Anglican and the Orthodox faiths in Europe. The two churches began formal meetings in 1966 in an effort to bring their churches respective theologies' together in the hope they would "eventually be visibly united in one church" (*Anglican-Orthodox Dialogue*, 1985: v). While this goal has

AOC's Mass was given in installments in its pages, although complete copies were eventually for sale and their purchase encouraged.

Since the theology of the AOC was developed and disseminated to the followers of the AOC by the Patriarch McGuire over a period of several years, the reason for the church's development in Whitney Pier cannot be limited to the issue of a unique, somehow inspiring theology. In fact, not one of the people interviewed for this research listed 'theology' as a reason in their decision to attend St. Philip's. It would appear there were reasons related more to social conscience or Black identity which guided most people to their decision to become a part of the congregation<sup>4</sup>.

#### *Community Response to St. Philip's*

As indicated above, St. Philip's began, in part, as a response to the racism experienced within the community. In a seemingly ironic twist, the church still experienced racism once it was established. It would seem Whites in the area did not want a 'Black' church in Whitney Pier, perhaps for fear of a loss of control over the Black community. The issue of congregational size is also a factor in this discussion. While some of the White churches in the area may not have wanted Black persons to be active in their congregations, they did not want another church in the area competing for parishioners.

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not been realized, the two churches have made progress on some theological issues.

<sup>4</sup> For theology not to be a deciding factor in a person's decision to attend one church versus another is not a new phenomenon. Armstrong (1993:91) in her analysis of the history of three monotheistic religious traditions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam,

The negative view of having a Black church within Sydney was not limited to rhetoric. The AOC experienced several incidents of vandalism in its early years at the hands of those in the community who were threatened by its existence. The church's altar was taken apart and the pulpit was stolen repeatedly, with a report it was used to house fowl on one occasion. The priest, Father Robertson, was also harassed. These incidents were compounded by the fact that church services were held in his house. Once when he was away on church business, his "clothes were destroyed, and his bed torn apart and water-soaked" (Beaton, 1988: 121).

### *Ethnic Identity*

There existed within the West Indian community at this time a sense of ethnic pride and awareness. Evidence for this can be found in the reports sent to the *Negro Churchman*, the official publication of the AOC<sup>5</sup>. Within these updates to the AOC headquarters is some evidence of the influence of the principles of the Universal Negro Improvement Association on the congregation. Appropriate to the UNIA's Back-to-Africa stance, the Ethiopian national anthem was sung at an Easter service (June, 1924). There were several active UNIA groups in Cape Breton (December 1924, March 1926). Marcus Garvey himself visited the area in 1937, although his influence as a Pan-African leader was waning by this

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claimed that for the Christians in Roman times, "Religion was a matter of cult and ritual, rather than ideas."

<sup>5</sup> Unfortunately, only the first nine volumes of this publication are available (Waters, 1982).

time (Beaton, 1988: 119).

That the church and community recognized their distinctive cultural tradition and character is not to suggest that the church was antagonistic to the White community. Indeed, although this appears entirely contradictory to the latent racism which was a constant in Sydney, the church was aided by the White community on several occasions and Whites often attended special services of the church. The Mayor of the City of Sydney met with Patriarch McGuire when the latter visited the church, and the steel plant gave the building now used by the church for its services (*Negro Churchman*). There is also a record of at least one White child being baptized in the church (Beaton, 1988). Even now, Whites participate in events put on by the church either in volunteering to help run the events or by attending them. Since the 1920's, the AOC has always been open officially to White membership, although until 1982 the governing of the church was restricted strictly to members of the Black community (*Negro Churchman*: August, 1928: 4-5; Beaton, 1988).

St. Philip's may not be entirely unique in terms of other Black denominations in the province, but in Sydney it is quite unique. It is the only predominately Black church in the area. There was an African Methodist Episcopal Church in the Pier at the turn of the century but it closed after 1923 (WPHS, 1993: 52). It may have closed because of the

introduction of the African Orthodox Church, but there are no data to confirm this assumption. As well, Cape Breton Island does not have a congregation of the African United Baptist Association (AUBA) Church, a major church within the Nova Scotia Black population. The closest AUBA church can be found in Guysborough County. St. Philip's then, is the only predominately Black church in the Industrial Cape Breton area. It is not surprising that many of the West Indian residents did not seek to establish a Baptist church in Whitney Pier. When they arrived in Canada they were coming from predominately Anglican, Roman Catholic and Methodist churches. Most sought out these denominations when they arrived but since they were not welcomed by those churches in the area they had to find a new church. The AOC incorporates elements of the Anglican and Catholic traditions so it was amenable to widespread religious needs.

#### *Community Attendance at Churches Other than St. Philip's*

Those denominations which might typically attract a significant Black congregation, like the Baptist, Pentecostal, Jehovah Witness, and Mormon churches (White and White, 1995: 295)<sup>6</sup> do not have a significant number of members in Sydney comparable to their membership in other parts of Nova Scotia and North America . There may be one to five families in each of the above congregations. In at least two of these

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<sup>6</sup> The number of Black persons joining the Church of Latter Day Saints has increased dramatically since the church removed its ban on Black priests in 1978 (White and

churches, the Faith Christian Fellowship<sup>7</sup> and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, the Black persons who attend the services are largely international students from Africa and Jamaica<sup>8</sup>. These churches, then, are not attracting people who are already part of the community. The most common Sydney church attended by Black persons from the community, other than the AOC is Trinity United Church in the Pier. The minister of this church claimed in 1997 that of the approximately 150 people who attend Sunday service, about twenty-five to thirty are Black. This subject will be discussed again in Chapter Six.

During the course of the interviews for this research, members of St. Philip's offered several reasons why people are not attending St. Philip's and are going to other churches in the area. The ritual of the church, as it has already been alluded to, is an amalgam of the Roman Catholic and Anglican traditions. The Mass, then, is very formal, with chanting, the recitation of a version of the Nicene Creed, and the "smells and bells" that one would find in a formal Eastern Orthodox Mass. Yet ironically, one member claimed (and there may be many similarly inclined) that the reason why only a few of the Canadian-born Black community attend St. Philip's is because of the formality of the liturgy. Most members of the Nova Scotia Black community were raised primarily

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White, 1995: 295).

<sup>7</sup> This church is the result of a schism in the Sydney Pentecostal Church in 1987, when four families left this congregation.

<sup>8</sup> This information was obtained through interviews with the clergy and/or members of



in the Baptist tradition and are more comfortable in a comparatively informal setting (Carol). Many of these people or their forebears have migrated to the Sydney area. On the other hand, several St. Philip's members likened the decision to attend other churches as a form of betrayal against the Black community. "I think that they feel good going to church on Sunday morning and sitting alongside a white person or when they reach out they shake a white person's hand instead of going to church and sitting among your own Black people" (Theresa). Still others mentioned more pragmatic reasons why people have made the decision to attend other churches. For example, Trinity United has hired a bus to take church members to Sunday services. One reason for this is that the City of Sydney does not offer public transit services on Sunday. This service is also particularly attractive during the winter or other times of inclement weather. As well, Trinity maintains its choir during the summer months, something St. Philip's does not do. At least one member of St. Philip's has made the decision to attend Trinity in the summer because she feels a choir is an integral element in a worship service.

#### *Uniqueness of St. Philip's*

Notwithstanding this perceived weakness at St. Philip's, an analysis of the historical development of the church highlights three reasons why it may be considered a unique religious institution in Sydney. The racism faced by immigrants from the West Indies in the

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the churches.

mainstream churches of the community was not a predominant element in the life experience of the other immigrants to the area. Unlike the other immigrants in the Sydney area (who brought religious traditions with them from their home countries), the AOC was brought into Whitney Pier to address specifically the needs of the West Indian immigrant population. In particular, racist actions towards the West Indians were widespread, even within the mainline Christian denominations in Whitney Pier. Ethnic identity was in the forefront of most West Indians in the area. They needed a church able to address their needs as a Black community and they believed the AOC was in a position to do so. This may be due to the notion of a 'Black God' which was promoted by McGuire. The church's development and presence in Whitney Pier is unique, then, because it was appealing to the ethnic identity of the West Indians as a result of the treatment they received in the other churches.

No other immigrant group seemed to receive public scorn within the churches of Whitney Pier since they had transplanted their churches from their home countries, and almost all were of European extraction. Thus, the AOC was developed as an ethnic church specifically because of the social conditions in the area in the 1920's. The other churches developed as a means of continuity between the old country and the new community whilst the AOC was in response to a specific social situation (notably racism) facing a particular group of people.

Although St. Philip's developed in the 1920's and 1930's as a church to serve the needs of the Black community of Whitney Pier, over time the church's distinction as the only Black church in the area has not changed. There have been no other churches that have appealed to the Cape Breton Black community *en masse*. As such, the parish of St. Philip's is still the primary expression of Black religiosity in the Sydney area.

### *Concluding Comments*

Given the difficulty in maintaining a church with an irregular but essentially declining membership, the question is why has St. Philip's stayed? This thesis has argued that the impetus for the foundation of the congregation was the racial climate in Cape Breton in the early half of this century. St. Philip's then, provided a focus for the West Indian community where meanings regarding what it meant to be Black in Sydney at this particular time could emerge. St. Philip's was a central part of this community and as such offered a place where "the communicative structures, social relationships, and interactive experiences that bind human beings to one another" (Denzin, 1993: ix) could take place. The particular theology of the church was not what was important to the members of St. Philip's. Rather, it was the sense of community which St. Philip's offered to the Black community.

While its ethnic focus initially may have drawn members of the

Black community to the church, St. Philip's present community involvement and outreach to others in the community may ensure the parish's survival. This issue will be addressed as a feature of the organization of the church and its service to the Black community, a subject to which I now turn.

## **Chapter Six**

### **Social Organization and Service to the Black Community**

This chapter essentially discusses the significance of St. Philip's in the community today. It first argues that although the membership of the church has declined since the 1950's it is still a vital part of the Black community of Whitney Pier. The chapter describes two potential reasons why the membership numbers have decreased: the economic situation of the area, the loss of youth members over the past forty years and continual racism. The church's place within the community cannot be measured by church membership alone but features such as the attendance and support of church-sponsored activities must also be considered. These activities, like the church's annual Caribbean Festival and their chicken and rice dinner sales, have already been mentioned. They indicate outreach not only to the Black community, but to anybody in the Sydney area, regardless of ethnic or denominational background. The second feature of this chapter includes an analysis of the unique role played by St. Philip's in its ministry to the Black community.

In turning to the first point, before discussing the drop in membership numbers at St. Philip's, the Canadian level of church attendance is examined briefly to place church attendance at St. Philip's in a broader context. The decline in membership of St. Philip's highlight two related aspects found elsewhere in Canada. Membership numbers in all major churches have

decreased since WWII<sup>1</sup>. This trend is particularly pronounced among Canadian youth. Bibby (1995: 16) claims Canadian national church attendance has dropped 30% between 1957 (53%) and 1993 (23%). The percentage of people aged 18-34 who attend church is, at 14%, just less than one half of the national attendance rate (Bibby, 1995: 16; see also Bibby, 1993: 74-77; Nock, 1993).

While the decrease in their church's membership may be alarming to the congregation of St. Philip's, in itself it is not a surprising finding. Churches throughout Canada are facing similar situations given the above statistics on Canadian church attendance. Many scholars see this decline in attendance as proof of the 'secularization' thesis. Secularization is the theory which states that, "religion- seen as a way of thinking, as the performance of particular practices, and as the institutionalization and organization of these patterns of thought and action- has lost influence [in] . . . western societies" (Wilson, 1966: *xz*). Religion loses its influence on members of a society because of an increased reliance on scientific explanation and the conviction that religion cannot be reconciled with a rational worldview (see Roberts, 1990: 314-135 and Turner, 1991: 10. 134-135). At the same time it is widely acknowledged that although this pattern affects church attendance, ironically there is still much interest in the spiritual world. In this thesis, no evidence for the secularization thesis was found but the participants did offer reasons

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<sup>1</sup> The only churches which seem to be avoiding a decline are evangelical groups, although they are growing at a rate which is less than one might expect (Bibby, 1995: 17-18)

why the attendance numbers had declined. These were the economic factors within Cape Breton leading to out-migration and the lack of young people coming to the church.

### *Membership*

The congregation of St. Philip's has changed since the church's inception in 1921. When it opened, the church served the West Indian immigrants who came to the area to work at the steel plant. The church does not officially emphasise this original ethnic focus now, as they do in fact have a few members who are Canadian-born members of the Black community as well as White members. Regardless of ethnicity, the church's membership is very small and it consists generally of older adults. The average age of the congregation is close to 60, and several are in poor health. Facts like this led one member, James, to remark that if the church was to "have a bad year" (e.g. a year in which several of the members died), the church might have to close its doors. St. Philip's has not been successful in attracting enough members of the Black community to the church to ensure a healthy survival. The following sections discuss reasons for this situation.

### *Economic Situation of Cape Breton and its Effects on Membership*

To say the economy of Cape Breton Region is bad is a gross understatement. While its official unemployment rate is now 19.7%, it has been suggested that the true rate is closer to 40% as people have simply

given up looking for work on the Island<sup>2</sup> (personal conversation with Paul Hobson, Economics Professor at Acadia University). Historically, the island's major employers have been the steel plant and the coal mines. Each of these industries employs only a fraction of the number of people they did in the earlier part of the century. As these industries have declined in their relative economic importance, other industries have not stepped in to replace them (Frank, 1980: 110, 114). The dismal economic outlook of the Cape Breton region has forced many people to leave the area. This lack of jobs is particularly difficult on young people. In 1991, the unemployment rate for people aged 15-24 was 33%, more than double the rate for people 25 and over, 15%. Cape Breton, then does not have the economic base to support its young people who know they have to leave the area to find economic opportunities.

Certainly loss of employment is one of the central reasons why many of the West Indians have left the area. Those who did leave were often well-educated individuals who saw no opportunity for themselves in the community. One member of the church characterised what happened as a 'brain drain': "These people were professionals or they were trades people. We had teachers, lawyers, people who owned their own businesses. Imagine if they had stayed here?" (Carol). While all of Cape Breton has suffered from

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<sup>2</sup> The unemployment rate does not include those people who have chosen not to participate in the labour force and those who have given up looking for work.



the exodus of its youth, especially those with education, Whitney Pier has been hit harder because of its already marginal economic status<sup>3</sup>.

The decline in the Cape Breton economy has had a negative effect on the economy of Whitney Pier. The number of stores servicing the community has decreased dramatically over the years. Whitney Pier used to have its own economic base, but now most of it has disappeared. In the 1940's, and earlier, there were tailors, movie theatres, several bakeries, small groceries stores, laundries and restaurant spread throughout the community.

They had their own grocery store on Tupper Street. A tailor, two, no three tailors. We had a shoemaker, Archies' [ a clothing store], Liquor Store. A clothing store, a snack store, Cricket Club on Tupper Street. At one time I can remember there were fifty-eight stores in the Pier. You didn't need to go 'over town'. They had the population and the Black people from the West Indies. Then, there were people who lived here and emigrated from places like Truro, New Glasgow, Guysborough County, they all moved down here (James).

What few commercial enterprises remain are clustered along Victoria Road, the main street through Whitney Pier. There remains a small grocery store, a clothing store, a pharmacy, a bar, video stores, and a few other little shops located within the neighbourhood. Nonetheless, compared to previous prosperity, the loss of job opportunities and subsequent closure of many stores has been a major loss for the community.

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<sup>3</sup> As a young, educated person from Cape Breton, I can attest to the fact that I and most of the people with whom I went to university have left the area or are making plans to leave the Island. One of the main reasons that many of us have made the decision is the decided lack of opportunity we see for ourselves there. See for example, alumni lists at the University College of Cape Breton.

Compounding the poor Cape Breton economic situation for West Indian and Black youths is the real and perceived prejudice of employers in the area. Many members of St. Philip's believe there is a tendency by area employers to discriminate against Black applicants. Those who have not decided to leave the area are typically not hired. A walk through the local malls and businesses will show very few Black people working in these places. This is especially telling in Whitney Pier since the store managers, for whatever reasons, tend not to hire Black residents. This fact was noted several times, often quite bitterly, during the interviews. "If my money is good enough to spend in there, then your money should be good enough to have one Black person working there" (Theresa). "If you go down to the stores and look at the clerks, you don't see very many Blacks. Tim Horton's in the Pier, thirty Blacks applied but there's none working there that I can see" (John). At least one person was pessimistic about the opportunities for members of the Black community in Sydney more generally: "You take the City of Sydney and there is no work for Black people. I don't know how people work here. There is no work for Black people" (James).

St. Philip's attempts to respond to this imbalance in employment practices. Archbishop Waterman, and Father Francis before him, emphasize that they try to find jobs for members of their congregation and the members of the Black community. Both clergy members have served as references for people as well as lobbying local businesses and government offices to hire Black residents.

When the people from the area emigrated to other parts of Canada and the United States they joined a variety of other churches (e.g. the Baptist, Anglican, Catholic, Jehovah's Witness faiths<sup>4</sup>; various interview transcripts). It is interesting to note that none of the out-migrants chose to go to parishes of the AOC when they settled in their new communities. This is understandable in Canada since the only AOC parish is in Sydney, but in the United States there are other congregations. A number of the West Indians from Sydney settled in Toronto and a parish of the AOC was started there. The denomination never had a solid foundation in the Toronto area, and it failed largely because by the time it was organized any potential congregation had disappeared (Carol).

St. Philip's, then, has lost members and potential new members as many members of the Black community have had to leave the area. The church cannot depend on its original membership of the West Indian immigrants since they have left the area. The church has to attract other members of the Black community and people of other ethnic groups if it is to survive.

Since St. Philip's is viewed as the Black church of the area, the congregation finds it surprising that more members of Black community do not attend the church.

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<sup>4</sup> It should be noted that not all migrants joined new churches. Some had made the decision not to attend any church.

Interviewer: So why did you choose St. Philip's?

Theresa: I figured that was my place

Interviewer: How come?

Theresa: Everybody in there was Black like me. I have never had anything said to me and I got lots of white friends but I figure I'll go in there.

Members of St. Philip's have often wondered why other members of the community, particularly Black residents, do not attend their church. "I don't know why [Black] people don't go there, it is the Black church" (John). One member commented that the reason Black persons were not attending St. Philip's was due to a perceived status symbol of going to a White church:

The younger people are going to other churches and some of the older ones because I think that they feel good going to church on Sunday morning and sitting alongside a white person, or when they reach out they shake a white person's hand instead of going to church and sitting among your own Black people (Theresa).

#### *Youth Attendance at St. Philip's*

Getting young people into the church is something Archbishop Waterman often discusses, and the members of St. Philip's are aware of the need. "The church is reachin' out to them, but they aren't reachin' to the church" (Theresa). The members of the congregation would like the number of children attending St. Philip's to increase as they see several ways in which the church can be of service to them. Some claim that the children need it for the guidance which the church can offer: "most of them [the young people] don't go to get a chance to be guided, but I think everybody needs it" (Gladys). Another sociologically important reason why some want children

to go to the church is for the memories of being part of this particularly unique congregation. They can take with them these memories and share them with others as they get older:

People in the community may not go to church when they are away, but they come to church all the time when they are here. They miss it. We talk about the times in the church and [Father Francis] being so strict. It stays with them. The kids when they get older aren't going to have things to talk about like this. Different sayings [Father Francis] said. The kids [today] don't have this (Carol).

While the connection to the community is important, people also believe St. Philip's helps to foster a sense of place in the larger Black community. "If it wasn't for that church. . . I told them before right from the meetings [in the beginning, sic], I said we have to [keep the church open], it's for our children, let them know who they is, and where they come from, what they did, and what they went through" (Elizabeth). Similar comments on fostering identity are mentioned by another study participant.

Interviewer: Do you think that the church was important in your life while you were growing up?

Theresa: Yes

I: Why?

T: It made you know who you was.

I: As a black woman?

T: As a Black person in general. Made you know who your parents was, where they come from.

I: So, it really helped you to feel a sense of community among Black people?

T: Yes.

The church functions as a living memory for the community. It is a repository for the history of the Black community in Whitney Pier, but it also serves as a connection to the Black community in other areas.

Not all members are concerned that the young people are not attending the church. At least one participant believes it is a normal stage for the young not to go to church. "You know when you're young, you don't have much interest in going to church" (Theresa). Theresa also assumed that there would be a time when younger people would be interested in going to church. Her decision to start attending church again, for example, came when she had her family and she wanted her children to go to church and Sunday school.

When I came to the feeling that I wanted to go to church, you know when you're young you don't have much interest in going to church. When you get older and start to get a family you have to go to church because you want the children to go to church, you want them to go to Sunday school. If you don't take them nobody will. That's how I got it.

From these above statements, it seems that there is a perceived pattern in the church attendance of young people: they went as children with their parents, stopped going as adolescents and young adults, and then when they started their own families they came back to the church. This cyclical approach to church attendance would work for St. Philip's, or any church for that matter, but there are only a few children who attend St. Philip's today. There are two children under the age of five who attend with their mother on a regular basis, and the altar girl was eleven at the time the research was

conducted within the church. At other times during field visits, a few other children would attend with some of the adults but their attendance did not seem to be consistent. There are, as well, no adolescents who attend St. Philip's services. Even when adults are not going to church, the loss of their membership is compounded by the fact they are also not introducing their children to the church. When their children grow up, it is likely they will be less interested in attending St. Philip's.

Since most children are not going to St. Philip's, their decisions could be affecting those who decide to go. One member said one of the reasons for the declining numbers of young people is found in the peer pressure placed on children by other children within the community<sup>5</sup>:

You get teased at St. Philip's if you go to church. You get teased and criticised by the other kids. Like the altar girl, she gets teased all the time and they [her friends] try to get her not to go. Things that go on they want her to go. But she can take it . . . We had a young fellow before her, but he got teased so much that he doesn't go to church now. She's [the altar girl] been there for about four or five years. She's been there for a while. But she doesn't mind what people say, if she wants to go [to church] she'll go (Gladys).

Young people who have decided not to attend St. Philip's are subtly influencing those that want to attend. The church, then, is not able to be as strong an influence in the lives of the 'new generation' and this will likely have an effect on their later decisions regarding which church they attend or if they attend any church at all.

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<sup>5</sup> Further fieldwork would have to be conducted if one were to see if this behaviour occurred when young people wanted to attend other churches.

### *Membership in Other Churches*

If the Black people of Whitney Pier are not going to St. Philip's, where are they going? Sydney, Nova Scotia has a variety of religious denominations, many of which have established churches - Roman Catholic, United, Polish Catholic, Ukrainian Catholic, and Anglican churches are all there. Apart from the main-line denominations in Sydney, there are also churches for the Salvation Army, Jehovah Witnesses, Baptist, Church of Latter Day Saints, and Pentecostal congregations.

Most members of the Black community attend Trinity United Church in Whitney Pier. The pastor for this church estimates there are approximately twenty-five to thirty members of the Black community who regularly attended Sunday service out of a congregation of about one hundred and fifty. The next most popular church was the Jehovah's Witnesses' with a "large number of Blacks" (church member). Other than these two churches; Trinity United and the Jehovah's Witnesses, most of the other churches in the area stated that only a small number of Black residents attend their churches, between one and five families. An unexpected finding is the fact that there are now no Black residents who attend the United Baptist church in Sydney. They had a few members in the past but they have left. Given that many Black people in Nova Scotia, the United States and Canada are Baptist, one would expect the Baptist church in Sydney to have a fair number of Black members (see Lincoln and Mamiya, 1990: 407).



Obtaining information on the ethnicity of church members was difficult. Many churches do not have regular clergy, so when questioned by this researcher they were not in a position to comment on the current ethnic composition of their respective churches. At least one church gave the researcher the name of a Black member of the church to gauge their feelings of the number of Black members in a particular church. It would appear that many clergy persons were not comfortable discussing the ethnic characteristics of their church's membership. When asked how many Black people typically attended Trinity United Church, the minister commented "they did not keep records like that". When indicated that an estimate of the numbers of Black members attending on a typical Sunday would be sufficient, he was still hesitant. People seem to be worried that if they draw attention to someone's colour or if they 'officially' notice it then they are in some way being discriminatory.

#### *Supports offered by St. Philip's*

A second feature of this chapter concerns the role played by St. Philip's in its ministry to the Black community. The number of people who attend Sunday Mass at St. Philip's has declined for the reasons discussed in the beginning of this chapter: the economic situation of the Cape Breton Region, and the decline in youth attendance. Although due to age, infirmity and lack of transportation, the Black community does not attend Mass at St. Philip's, they do make the effort to support and participate in the church-sponsored

activities. These social and community activities offer something to the Black and West Indian community that is not met by other organizations in the area.

The most important element of St. Philip's service to the community is promotion of its ethnic heritage. Under this rubric we can also see how this church combats the lack of support given elsewhere to the Black community. I have also identified two major stresses within the Black community which influence some people's decision to either attend St. Philip's or participate in its activities. These are the problems of racism within the community and the general lack of cultural support for the Black community. The remainder of this section will address how St. Philip's responds to the needs within this community.

#### *Perceptions of Racism within the Community*

The people interviewed for this research claimed to have had no direct experience with racism, especially with reference to areas such as employment or housing. This reluctance could, of course, reflect the fact that I as a White person, was asking the questions. Nevertheless, the respondents did speak to the issue of discrimination. Only one person suspected advancement at his place of employment had been withheld because of his colour (John). "I: Have you ever been unemployed because of your colour? R: (Long pause) Maybe not unemployment, but [gaining] higher positions because of my colour, yes."

There was racial discrimination too at the steel plant especially in the early years. . . the Black man didn't advance themselves in the steel plant. You might have met one or two different people that might have elevated themselves to what they call a shift foreman, but never to a general foreman or a supervisor (John).

This sentiment was echoed by one woman speaking about her husband's experience working in the steel plant: "One time you had to be there [steel plant] for years and years before you got anything and even then you probably didn't get it even if you was entitled to it. Today it is a little bit different" (Elizabeth).

All but one of the Black participants claimed they had been attacked by ethnic slurs. One woman stated simply "oh, the names they used to call us" (Elizabeth). Most people seemed to have experienced name calling so often while growing up that in a discussion about incidents of discrimination, most mentioned them in an off-hand manner. "Interviewer: Have you had any personal experiences with discrimination? Respondent: Not that I know of, well, ethnic slurs growing up" (Carol).

Interestingly, St. Philip's congregants mostly view racism or prejudice as a personal issue, i.e. it is the problem of the person with the racist views: "if someone does not like you, it's because they are looking at you. They form an opinion of you . . . ' I don't like your face.' It's the other person's problem: (Archbishop); "I got nothing for you, you got nothing for me. I can talk to anybody, and if you don't want to talk to me, I don't care" (Theresa); "Nothing you can do about it [racism], it's the way a person is. Somethings

you can change, what you can't change, leave alone. It's who the person is. If people could accept this, then things would be much better" (Elizabeth).

If you don't want to talk to me that's fine, someone else will. It's just that person has that hang-up. They had a chip on their shoulder and they just don't like that person because of their colour. God made everyone. And wherever you go. . . there is going to be that hate. I should say you are going to take it the grave. And I say you have to love sometime (Rose).

Even more systematic forms of racism (e.g., employment inequity), were seen by Black members of the congregation from this level. They believe that in changing the individual person that prejudice can be slowed although most do not hold much hope for the day when racism is eliminated<sup>6</sup>,

I wonder when the time will ever come where people will just look at you for who you are inside and not the colour of your skin, like Martin Luther {King Jr.} always used to say. I'll never see it in my lifetime. I don't know if my kids will see it, because I think that sometimes we go ahead but we go back. I hear of different things and I say 'Oh my' (Carol).

Most people interviewed for this thesis do not see great advancement in the area of race relations in Cape Breton. They feel that the overt acts of discrimination and prejudice have decreased in the past number of years, but this belief is tempered by the realization that these feelings may come back at any moment. "Interviewer: Do you think there was much discrimination back then [when you were growing up]? Respondent: Yes there was. It wasn't as masked as it is today, but the feelings are still there"

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<sup>6</sup> During Black Heritage Month in February 1997, the Archbishop went to a small fishing community in Cape Breton County to speak about Black culture. He found that "some of those kids had never seen a Black person. Only on TV with all of the stereotypes, so this is a good education for the kids" (Carol). It may have been a small step but they did see it as a step to diminish potential bias and prejudice in the children.

(John). People may not use ethnic slurs to a person's face anymore, but the feelings from which such actions stem are still there. "Racism is never going to change. You hope it will, but it will never change. It can go down, down, down, but all of a sudden it come back up and you are back to square one" (Rose). Others see it as getting worse in the area and people becoming more blatant in their feelings. "I can see it moving in here. I see the Southern license plates [Confederation flag] now. They are white supremacists. I see a few in Sydney and even in the Pier" (James). A discussion with one church member turned to talk about an individual at the local university who was a known racist and her utter disbelief that his type of attitude and behaviour would be allowed in this day and age.

Further, if a Black person was not given a job, one stated reason by the employer for their refusal could be lack of education. Most St. Philip's parishioners claimed that if a Black person had the experience and the education an employer would have no choice but to hire a Black person. For this reason, St. Philip's promotes education to Black youth, and the church's clergy is often involved in helping mostly the young people of the community to find employment. During the February 1997 Black History Month, two speakers came to discuss the importance of education and the role parents play in ensuring that their children receive the education they need to be able to enter higher status occupations. This feeling was echoed in several of the interviews: "Stay in school or you won't accomplish anything" (Rose); "West Indian parents, they may not have had the education but their kids

will. They pushed them” (Carol). Education is seen as a way to attack the racism many observed in obtaining employment; if a person had the proper qualifications for a job then they do not see the reason why they will be denied employment.

The church pushes for education, but it also provided other supports for Black youth and residents who are looking for employment.

Growing up, there wasn't always organizations to help you get jobs so [Father Francis] helped some people get jobs. The Provincial Building, [Father Francis] helped the first person get a job there. . . Now you have organizations to do that. It [the church] was good for Black heritage and recommendations for jobs. People still come to the church for that. But they know that if they put it in their resumes that it looks good (Carol).

The unemployment, he's [Archbishop Waterman] always looking for jobs people, giving recommendations. A lot of them want recommendations and they don't go to church. He has a problem with that. And he can't, you know, he's in a turmoil. He doesn't want to lie (Gladys).

The congregation sees the church as playing an important role in helping the community deal with racism within the community.

I: Does Father Waterman help the community face discrimination?

R: Yah, he does a lot. More talking, talk around things. He sees things the right way. A lot of the things that happen down there, he knows what to do (Gladys).

“We will not adhere to any racist beliefs or bigoted views. As far as human beings are concerned, we teach people how to get along with one another. . . Christ said to love one another” (Archbishop Waterman).

I: Does St. Philip's help the community to deal with racism?

R: People now know more about the Black community because the church has functions to let people know that the black community is here... and that the church is a focal point of it. People will come to the church. They may not come to the Pier for anything else, but they will come to the church. The church seems to have had a positive role and good reputation. The church has been very vocal (Carol)

It is believed by these respondents that racism will decrease in the area if the people in the community are made aware of the positive elements of the Black community.

One of the ways in which the church functions to ease the stress of racism within the community is to promote the Black community as an important cultural component of Sydney.

### *Cultural Support*

St. Philip's is the only active expression of Black culture within Sydney although there are other organizations which offer support the Black community, (e.g., BLAC Black Learner's Association). Many of these organizations help Black residents find employment or help younger people with school-related problems, actions which were traditionally done by St. Philip's. Even though St. Philip's apparent influence in these areas is waning, the church does have an important role to play within the cultural context of Sydney. I have noted that, for example, the activities the church puts on celebrate and promote the West Indian and Black heritage of the Black community. The following section describes the church-sponsored

activities and illustrates the ways in which they promote the ethnicity of the community.

### *Description of Activities*

The activities which are sponsored by St. Philip's can be divided into two categories - special functions and on-going events<sup>7</sup>. Elsewhere I have briefly introduced these features, but now there is a need to expand on them. The special functions are activities that occur rarely like the annual Caribbean Festival and the 1985 West Indian reunion. The on-going activities are the weekly merchandise bingos and the dinner sales which are held every few months. These two types of functions will now be described in the next section.

### *Special Functions*

The Caribbean Festival is the largest event the church sponsors during the year. It draws people from the Whitney Pier community and from Sydney. The Festival is listed in Sydney tourism brochures promoting Action Week, a community-wide celebration. The Festival often attracts people who come from long distances<sup>8</sup>. Action Week is held during the first week of August and the Festival is held on the Monday. This date is a benefit to the

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<sup>7</sup> These activities are organized by the church's Altar Guild.

<sup>8</sup> This information comes from participating in the 1997 Caribbean Festival and speaking to the some of the people who attended the event.



church organizers since this day is a Civic Holiday in Nova Scotia allowing more people the opportunity to attend.

For St. Philip's, the Festival is of major significance because it is their largest event of the year and it seems to be the main fund-raising activity of the year. For example, the Altar Guild did not expect the community response it received the first time it hosted the Caribbean Festival in 1984:

The first time we had it I thought it was going to be a one-time thing, "let's get some money". Not knowing it was going to be a big thing and people from all over would come. The response was overwhelming; [we] had to put a piece in the paper apologizing because we weren't prepared for it. We ran out of food and everything else. (Carol).

After the success of the first Caribbean Festival, the City of Sydney contacted the church the following year and asked if they would continue the event:

The next year the city called me and asked me if I could do it. And I said "well it was just a one shot deal." And she said "Oh, no this would be a nice thing for Action Week" and it is our biggest fund-raiser to last for the entire year.

The Festival has become the main fund-raiser for the church, but it also depends on the generosity of community merchants to donate items. With decreasing government funding for community organizations, the church now has to purchase items that were once donated:

Merchants donate ice, but not the food. We buy that. The pop, Shoppers Drug Mart gave us a dozen cases of pop, which was a help. Our first year we got more donations because not as many people were looking for donations. Now we go to stores and they say "sorry, we've already given our quota". And if they can't give prizes, maybe they can give us 10% off, which is help. But at least we have the money to pay for it and we didn't have that before. (Carol).

The Festival attempts to offer activities that attract all ages within the community. Below is a description of a typical Caribbean Festival day:

Now this is our 12th, 13th year doing it . . . It's held right here [in the churchyard], we cordon off the street from the top of Victoria [Road] and we have the booths set up in the yard. And besides the chicken and rice we also have a barbecue, we sell chips and pop . . . And we have games for the kids; straw games and merchants give us prizes for the games . . . And we have Bingo at 3:00 in the afternoon. Now they go to the Melnick hall. And then a band plays from 7-9 and we sell hot-dogs. And then we go home tired. But it is worth it because everyone has fun.  
(Carol)

The day of the Caribbean Festival truly is an all day affair. This researcher had the privilege of participating in the 1997 Festival as a volunteer helping in the church yard, setting up the tables with merchandise and prizes, and running some of the games. By 10:00 am the day of the Festival, the church yard was full of church members getting ready for the day.

Since the festival is such a big event in Whitney Pier and Sydney, in 1997 there were also volunteers from both communities. The volunteers consisted of people whose family members were regular members of St. Philip's, although they did not attend. For example, Gladys is the only member of her family who attends St. Philip's, but her sister informed this researcher she had volunteered for the past two Caribbean Festivals. The volunteers helped out the day of the Festival, they did not aid in organizing the event. These volunteers, like this researcher, helped to set up the church yard, set up game tables, and run the various activities for the children.

At the 1997 Caribbean Festival, there were approximately 300 people which was considered by the organizers to be an average turn out for the Festival. The people who come to the Festival represent the diverse population of Sydney. There are business people from Sydney who come for the cultural experience, and there are also families who come with their children. A sight often seen at the Festival are women who bring their own young children as well as their children's friends or cousins. One woman, then, can be responsible for upwards of five children under the age of ten. The children seem to enjoy the games at the Festival. While the prizes they receive are not large, they have competitions among themselves to see who can get the most and the best toys. Most of the games cost twenty-five to fifty cents a round so the children can play several games for a small amount of money.

As the afternoon wears on, the teen-agers and young adults of the community come to the Festival. Most of them simply stand on the other side of the street in groups of approximately six people listening and dancing to the calypso music playing in the church yard. They observe more than participate in the church yard activities as they take advantage of the event to be seen and to socialize with their peer group. A number of older adult women also attend the Festival but they come for the bingo game so they leave at around 3:00 pm when the game starts two blocks away at the Melnick Hall. Many also simply drop in to purchase chicken and rice dinners

from the kitchen and take them home for themselves and/or other family members and neighbours.

The day part of the festival starts to draw to a close around 5:00 pm. At this point many people go home to get ready for the concert that was to be held in the evening. The volunteers count the money and clean up the church yard and basement in preparation for the concert. Unfortunately, in 1997 the weather did not co-operate with St. Philip's. The rain that had been threatening since the early afternoon came in the evening so the concert with a local act from Whitney Pier was cancelled and not re-scheduled.

In 1985 the Caribbean Festival coincided with a week-long West Indian reunion being held in the Whitney Pier community. "The Pier came alive that year" (Carol), was how one member described the feeling within the community.

A lot of people went to Toronto [when they left the community]. They took the train [back to Cape Breton] and it started in Toronto and it picked people up as it went. They had an entire car to themselves and as they went on people knew about it. A mayor in New Brunswick had a sign with "Welcome Cape Bretoners" and a case of lobsters. They were met at the train station in Sydney by the community. The train was late but the Town Crier went to Truro. It was really neat to figure out who people were and there were tears and laughter. That [train] came in on a Sunday and Monday was our Caribbean Festival (Carol).

During the reunion, the church held a number of church services. They sponsored dinners and dances, and trips to Cape Breton tourist spots. This reunion also coincided with the City of Sydney's Bicentennial celebrations. so

the entire city was celebrating at the same time (Letter from the Organizer, Beaton Institute).

### *On-Going Functions*

Besides these special activities, the Altar Guild also holds regular events. As indicated elsewhere in this thesis, the Guild holds weekly merchandise Bingo games, dinners every two to three months and holiday teas. It is these events which ensure that St. Philip's has the money needed for the monthly bills and other such expenses and maintains its presence in the community. They are the chief sources of revenue, actual church contributions from membership being nominal.

One of the Altar Guild's more successful events is its' weekly merchandise bingos for the congregation and members of the community:

"Every Tuesday, we have socials and people from the community come over. We don't advertise because we don't want it to turn into a regular bingo game, but we have about twenty to twenty-five regulars. And that is really nice and we play about fifteen games of bingo. They must like coming here because there are big bingos going on with lots of money. And afterwards, we have tea and coffee and sandwiches, cookies and cake. We do this every week" (Carol).

The money raised from these bingos is enough to cover expenses such as electricity bills as well as enabling them to purchase items such as a dishwasher and a plane ticket to take the Altar girl to a Synod in 1996 (discussion with the president of the Altar Guild).

While there are no organizations or activities within the church officially designated for women, there are functions which are primarily

attended by women. The merchandise bingo games, for example, are supported by and mainly attended by women from many parts of the community. One man within the church claimed that he took part in all of the activities of the church but, "I don't go down to the Merchandise Bingo at all. No, I don't like bingo" (Fred). We can see from his reference a designation of what is deemed to be women's activity.

Church dinners are held once every two to three months and are not usually tied to a religious holiday or community event<sup>9</sup>. They are advertised in the church and throughout the community using posters and the community service bulletins on local radio stations and the cable television station. The food is prepared by members of the church in their own kitchens. On the day of the sale, the food is brought to the church kitchen where it is re-heated and packaged. The dinners can be eaten in the church - they have an area designated for this purpose - or they can be taken out. The church also offers free delivery for the dinners. Many workers in Whitney Pier, such as teachers and store clerks, take advantage of this food for lunch on the day of the sale. Approximately 350 dinners are sold at each sale. All church members take part in the running of these dinners including the Archbishop. Some people sell tickets for the dinners, others clean the kitchen before and after the sale, some people assemble the dinner packages, while others

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<sup>9</sup> See the Dodson and Gilkes (1995) article "There's Nothing Like Church Food", for an analysis of the importance of food in the African American Christian tradition.

deliver the dinners and cook the food. People do what they can for their church given their respective talents and available time.

Unlike the Caribbean Festival, the chicken and rice dinner sales do not have volunteers from outside the congregation. The dinner sales depend solely on the efforts of the church members. This is understandable given the amount of work which is needed to host the Caribbean Festival versus the dinner sales. Most of the work for the dinner sales takes place within the church kitchen which cannot accommodate a large number of people. While not all of the community is able to volunteer their services on the day of the dinner sales, they support the church through their purchases of the meals.

Except for the reunion in 1985, many of the activities sponsored by the Altar Guild are ostensibly fund-raising<sup>10</sup>. They do, however, put on events which are for educational purposes. During Black History Month in February of 1997 the church held several events for the community. In one event, a Black judge from Halifax came to Sydney to talk about the importance of education. Following this presentation they had a religious service and inspirational singers from Halifax. One woman was touched by singers and claimed, "The voices, it surrounded my soul" (Rose). The Altar Guild has also reached out to the community. During the same month, the church held a Caribbean chicken and rice dinner with the Red Cross to raise relief money for the people of Zimbabwe. This association with the Red Cross

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<sup>10</sup> St. Philip's receives no funding from the AOC headquarters in New York so they are dependent upon their own fund-raising to support the church.

was also important in that it helped to make connections within the community, "Now the Red Cross had a chicken and rice dinner last week and they were just impressed . . . Now with the Red Cross we have established a community link" (Carol)<sup>11</sup>.

### *Uniqueness of St. Philip's*

The Black community within Whitney Pier is served by the unique religious institution of St. Philip's. St. Philip's is one of three ethnic churches left in the Whitney Pier area, but the number of churches serving ethnic communities has declined. That St. Philip's has maintained visibility in the community is a testament to its will to survive. People within the community may not know of St. Philip's affiliation with the African Orthodox Church, but they do know a Black church exists in Whitney Pier. This was echoed by Carol when she stated, "People now know more about the Black community because the church has functions to let people know that the black community is here and the church is a focal point of it." The church has received recognition for its activities and its promotion of Black culture. The Caribbean Festival and the Caribbean Chicken and Rice dinners attract people from throughout the community. St. Philip's is the only church in the area to promote its ethnic heritage in the activities it sponsors.

These activities have two goals: they promote West Indian culture and they attempt to promote unity between the different ethnic groups of Sydney. While St. Philip's seeks to maintain its ethnic focus within the Black

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<sup>11</sup> This type of community outreach has yet to be repeated since 1997.



community, it is open to anyone who wishes to attend. One member of the congregation stated “Well, I say this. . . anybody who comes in White, Black, Chinese, Indian or whatever, if you come, you are welcome. All of us stop to speak, ‘who are you’, ‘where are you from’.” The Archbishop is adamant that the church and its activities are open to all people regardless of their ethnicity: “We cross all ethnic lines. We do smile at the idea of colours . . . . The church should be open because there will be times in your life when you sit in the back of the church and you pour your heart out to God and there is no one besides you. You can tell Him what you want.” Yet, despite the church’s goal of ethnic unity, most people in the community still perceive St. Philip’s to be the Black church of Sydney. “It is the Black church” (John).

It can be argued that St. Philip’s is the only church in the area which engages in ethnic ‘promotion.’ because members have to deal with racism on a regular basis. As was discussed earlier, the people of St. Philip’s do not see great advancements in race relations in Cape Breton. This is especially telling in terms of economics as members of the Black community are discriminated against in the job market. The church’s response to these factors is unique to the area. The other area churches in Sydney do not actively campaign against racism in the same way since it is not expected to be a part of the daily experiences of most of their membership.

In this chapter, I have focussed specifically on two important sociological themes: reasons for membership decline at St. Philips’, and in contrast the reasons why the parish is still remarkably alive and fulfilling an

important role for the Black community in Sydney. According to symbolic interactionist theory as discussed in Chapter One, the objective reality is ascribed meaning by the participants in a social situation. In this chapter we have seen the types of activities organized by St. Philip's are similar in many respects to the types of activities put on by other churches. Other churches' have bingo's, bazaars, or other types of community activities. In this case, though, it is the meaning attached to the activities which concern us. The congregation of St. Philip's see themselves as the purveyor of West Indian and Black heritage in Whitney Pier. As such, the meanings ascribed to the activities are qualitatively different than one would expect to find in the activities run by other churches in the Sydney area. The people who attend St. Philip's' activities seem to respond to the meaning intrinsic to these activities. The activities then, are more than simply fund-raising; they are a venue for the Black community to celebrate its heritage. Hence, attendance at Sunday Mass, while an important element, is not required to immerse oneself in the Black community of Whitney Pier. St. Philip's is fulfilling the same type of function it did when it was first founded in Whitney Pier. It offers a place where the Black community can develop its own meanings regarding what it means to be Black in Sydney in the 1990s.

I now turn to a general conclusion in which I propose to bring forward a summary of my main argument and a final commentary on this remarkable Black spiritual home.

## Chapter Seven Conclusion

In this thesis I have argued that St. Philip's African Orthodox Church is a unique institution within both the Black community of Nova Scotia and specifically within the religious denominational choices available in Sydney, Nova Scotia. This chapter will serve as a synopsis of this argument. It is accomplished by addressing explicitly the questions raised in the thesis regarding the reasons for the church's presence in Sydney and what it offers to the Black community. These two facets of the church illustrate how St. Philip's is unique and why it is an interesting and important sociological as well as theological phenomenon.

First, of primary significance is the way in which St. Philip's AOC came to Whitney Pier in 1921 as one of the neighbourhood's many ethnic churches. The church served the West Indian community who had immigrated to Sydney to work at the steel plant. The European migrants who had come to Sydney to work at the steel plant brought their own religious traditions with them from their home countries and did not have to concern themselves with finding a place of worship. The West Indians, however, were coming from a variety of Christian denominations. Most wanted to maintain their affiliation with the churches of which they were members in their home countries. But within the established churches of Whitney Pier, the West Indian community was subjected to acts of overt

prejudice, and many Blacks were simply shunned at religious services in mainline denominational churches.

This situation was unfortunately consistent with what other Black communities in North America experienced in the 19th and early 20th centuries. At the same time this attitude was prevalent in Canada. This is because during the 19th century (up to the end of the American Civil War in 1865), Canada was perceived as a known and welcome refuge for many American Blacks seeking sanctuary. “[The Underground Railway] was the cause of a legend that would make it possible for Canadians to reinforce their self-congratulatory attitudes towards their position on the Negro and to stress those self-congratulatory assumptions into the twentieth century (Winks, 1971: 233, c.f. Walker, 1985: 6-7). Henry et al (1995: 1, emphasis added) offer similar statements when they claim:

[We have] cast an illusory spell that has allowed Canadians to ignore the harsh reality of a society divided by colour and ethnicity. *Canada suffers from historical amnesia . . .* Canadians have obliterated from their collective memory the racist laws, policies, and practices that have shaped their major . . . institutions for 300 years.

Since the West Indian immigrants were not welcomed into the Sydney area churches, not unexpectedly they formed their own church: St. Philip’s. The West Indians came from a variety of geographic locations, and from a number of different denominations. Thus, a church that was a specific continuation of one of these denominations would likely alienate members of other religious traditions. If the West Indian community was to have its own

church it needed one which could transcend traditional denominational bias. It was exactly at this time the AOC established in New York. The AOC did not have a reputation in Nova Scotia. In fact, when the AOC came to Sydney it was so new to the area that each member could participate as a founding figure of the church. They were not 'new' members to a church with an established membership base and denominational associations but actual religious pioneers, fashioning a completely new religious tradition in Canada. The West Indian immigrants could manage their church in a way to suit their community. Other immigrants to the area began new churches but these were, in effect, branches from their home countries. The AOC (through St. Philip's parish), on the other hand, was imported to the area to address the needs of the West Indian immigrant community but without a link to a strong home church with an established theological and financial basis.

St. Philip's is unique to the sociologist of religion since it is the only congregation of its denomination (AOC) in Canada. From its inception, St. Philips addressed the central issue of ethnic identity for the Black community. Many of the spiritual activities of the Black peoples in Sydney and elsewhere mirrored those which occurred in their home countries. For example, in its early years, St. Philip's hosted "Love Feasts" modeled on the festivals hosted by the Moravian churches in the West Indies (*Negro Churchman*, November 1926). St. Philip's also maintained ties to the Universal Negro Improvement Association until the 1940's (Whitney Pier

Historical Society, 1993: 33). Although since its inception in 1921 there has been no other church in Cape Breton with the mandate to serve specifically the Black community; it is noted that now many members of the Black community in Whitney Pier and the Sydney area attend Trinity United Church. For the record, Black affiliation accounts for only a small proportion of this church's membership, but the reason for Black membership in a largely White congregation like Trinity United are sociologically revealing. Many members of the Black community may not want to be 'ghettoized' spiritually or culturally. Despite the fact that over the decades St. Philip's has apparently lost the allegiance of many Black adherents because of these and other reasons (largely economic), the church is still the only one in Cape Breton which actively reaches out to the Black community in the name of ethnicity or pride in race.

This leads me to a second theme I have aimed to bring forward, that despite a decline in Black membership at St. Philip's over the years, the role of the church within the community has continued steadfastly and braving a decline in membership. St. Philip's actively reaches out to the Black community in a variety of ways. It hosts activities like the Caribbean festival and 'Chicken and Rice' dinners which proudly demonstrate the source of its West Indian heritage. The church also hosts events during Black History Month which celebrate the larger Black community in the province, and indeed the continent. Importantly, these activities are open to all members of

the community regardless of their ethnicity. In this way, St. Philip's still has an important role as a 'guardian spirit' and caretaker of Black ethnic consciousness in Nova Scotia.

While there are two other specifically ethnic churches in Whitney Pier, they do not actively promote their ethnicity to the outside community. The Polish church, for example, conducts one Mass per month in Polish but it does not host activities for the community with an emphasis on Polish heritage. From my observations, even those churches which are not considered ethnic churches but have a large ethnic population (e.g. Scottish or Irish), do not sponsor activities which highlight ethnicity.

St. Philip's concerted effort to accentuate its ethnic heritage is unique to the Sydney area's various congregations. Indeed, it could be argued that it is this promotion of ethnicity which is a central focus of St. Philip's ministry. In this way, the church has more than just a spiritual mission. It is actively engaged in raising Black consciousness and community awareness of Black heritage. It does this quietly, working through its members who, though comparatively few in number, nonetheless show the greater community in the Sydney region the living spirit of a Black church.

Thus through its activities promoting Black culture, St. Philip's offers the Black community both a place to spiritually rejoice in their heritage and a place of refuge from the continuation of experiences that persist as discrimination and prejudice that most members of the Black community

claim is still a problem for Sydney. Although many of the members of St. Philip's claim incidents of racism have declined over the past few decades, most believe negative feelings toward the Black community still exists. St. Philip's is the only church in the area which actively addresses the issue of racism on a regular basis. Indeed, it may be the only church in Sydney where the effects of racism are part of the daily lived experience of its congregation.

St. Philip's thus offers the Black community a place where its members can share concerns and challenges simply by being around people who have had similar experiences. Although not many actually attend Mass at St. Philip's, they do support the church through its social and pastoral activities. This is perhaps the most important aspect of the church. The Mass is ritually a vital element of church life but the Black community appears to respond to the ethnic 'awareness' activities and identity of the church, rather than to its theology or its program of religious services.

### *Concluding Comments*

The congregation of St. Philip's is a unique religious institution within the City of Sydney. Its presence in the community is a testimony of the treatment West Indian immigrants faced when they arrived in Canada. Today the church is a place where the Black community can come together to celebrate their ethnicity and heritage. The church is a witness to the diversity and determination of the Black community to survive in a



community which has not always fully appreciated its ethnic heterogeneity.

But the parish of St. Philip's is facing a turning point in its history. With its aging congregation, the church needs an influx of new, younger members if the church is to be sustained in the next century. Non-Blacks have given little historical recognition to this ethnic church in Sydney. For example, as I noted at the beginning, it was not through any formal education that I learned about St. Philip's, but rather while on a community walking tour. If St. Philip's is simply allowed to fade away, most people in Sydney will not notice its closure. The Black community within Whitney Pier, however, will lose a prime venue for an expression of their culture. The larger Black community in Nova Scotia will also lose a unique feature of its history. The West Indians who immigrated to Cape Breton in the 1910's and 1920's have had different experiences than members of the Canadian-born Black community whose forbearers have been here since the late 1700's. One manifestation of this cultural experience is St. Philip's.

Further examination of the reasons why members of the Black community does claim affiliation to St. Philip's, or conversely, do not affiliate themselves with the church may help to reverse this present situation. As a related project, the oral histories of early members of the church would help to preserve the history of this church and the West Indian community of Whitney Pier for later generations. Information such as this would benefit the scholar studying ethnic churches as well as providing a record for the

community itself. Following from this thought, research should also be conducted in the general Black community to examine the manners in which they address being members of a minority group in an area such as Sydney which does not have a large minority population. As well, further to the research presented in this thesis, a more in-depth examination of religious options available to members of the Black community in Whitney Pier would help to highlight the role played by St. Philip's in this community. Following this proposal, one could also extend the study to include the religious options for the Black community in other parts of Nova Scotia. Studies such as these may help to answer the question of why there is no representative of the African United Baptist Association in Cape Breton while it has a strong presence on the mainland of the province. This thesis, constrained as it was by resources and time, has presented only one small aspect of the Black community in Whitney Pier and the congregation of St. Philip's. The suggestions for further research listed above offer only a glimpse at the many diverse ways at examining this exciting community and church.

One final note must be made before this thesis can be concluded. During an interview, one member of St. Philip's gave me a lesson in how to live a life with dignity and strength. "You follow your own . . . Keep your faith and don't lose your courage. Once you lose your courage you are finished." St. Philip's has kept its courage and it helps the Black community maintain its own dignity and strength.

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**Appendix A**  
**Agreement to Participate**

I \_\_\_\_\_ agree to participate in the research project on the Black community and the African Orthodox Church conducted by Kim Harding, a masters student at Acadia University. I understand that any information provided will be properly recorded and neither my name nor any identifiable characteristics will be used in the thesis.

Signature of Participant: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Interviewer: \_\_\_\_\_

For more information please feel free to contact me at:

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## **Appendix B**

### **Interview Questions**

#### *Demographics*

- 1) When were you born?
- 2) What is your marital status?
- 3) What kind of work do you do?
- 4) What kind of work did your spouse do?
- 8) Who lives in your household? (Get age and relationship of each person)
- 9) Do any of your family members live in the Pier?
- 11) What is the highest year of school that you completed?
- 12) What about for your spouse?

#### *Personal History*

- 1) How did you come to Cape Breton?
  - a) What about the Pier?
- 2) On your father's side of the family,
  - a) Where did his first ancestor to settle in Caper Breton come from?
  - b) Do you know who that ancestor was? Was it his mother, father, uncle, etc.?
  - c) When did the ancestor come to the Island?
  - d) Why did they decide to come to Cape Breton?
  - e) Where did they settle? Why?
  - f) Did they move from this place later in life?

- g) Do you know if they attended church in their homeland?
  - h) What denomination was it?
  - i) What church did they attend when they came to CB? Why?
  - j) Did they attend any other churches in CB? When and why?
- 3) Now, on your mother's side of the family,
- a) Where did his first ancestor to settle in Caper Breton come from?
  - b) Do you know who that ancestor was? Was it her mother, father, uncle, etc.?
  - c) When did the ancestor come to the Island?
  - d) Why did they decide to come to C.B.?
  - e) Where did they settle? Why?
  - f) Did they move from this place later in life?
  - g) Do you know if they attended church in their homeland?
  - h) What denomination was it?
  - i) What church, if any did they attend when they first came to CB?  
Why?
  - j) Did they later attend any other churches in CB? When and why?
- 4) When did your family come to the Pier?
- 5) Why did they decide to come here?
- 6) What did your parents do for a living?
- 7) Where were you born?
- 8) Where did you grow up?
- 9) What church did you attend growing up?



- 10) Do you remember how often you went?
- 11) Do you remember if you Black neighbours attended any other churches?
  - a) If so, what denomination?
- 12) Could you tell me a little about what it was like growing up in the Pier?
- 13) What school did you attend? What was that like?
- 14) Do you remember if there were any other organizations for Blacks or organized activities?
  - a) What were they and what did they do?

### *Religious Career*

- 1) What church do you attend today?
  - a) What about your spouse?
- 2) How often do you usually attend?
  - a) What about your spouse?
- 3) Have you ever attended any other churches here in Sydney? When and Why?
  - a) Do you attend any other churches now? When and Why?
    - b) What about your spouse, have they ever attended any other churches in Sydney?
      - c) Do they attend any other churches now? When and Why?
- 4) Why did you choose to attend St. Philip's?
  - a) What about your spouse?
- 6) When did you start attending services there?
  - a) What about your spouse?
- 7) How did you learn about St. Philip's?
- 8) Has your spouse changed their choice of church over the years?

- 9) What church did they belong to before you got married?
- 10) What kinds of activities or organizations are run by the church?
- 11) Do you take part in any of them?
  - a) How did you get involved?
  - b) What is your role in them?
- 12) What do they do?
- 13) Are there any organizations for Blacks in the Pier today?
  - i) What are they?
    - a) What about in Sydney?
      - i) What are they?
- 14) What do they do?
- 15) What do you think of them?
- 16) Are you a member of any organization not connected to St. Philip's but in the Pier?
- 17) What do they do?
  - a) How did you get involved with it/ them?
  - b) What is your role in this group?
- 18) What about in the larger community of Sydney, are you a member of any organization?
  - a) What do they do?
  - b) How did you get involved?
  - c) What is your role in this group?

### *Racism*

- 1) When you were growing up did you have much contact with other ethnic groups, either in school or just "hanging out" in the neighbourhood?
- 2) Do you think that there was much discrimination against Black people back then?

- 3) have you had any experiences with discrimination?
  - a) Have you ever been denied housing because of your ethnic background?
  - b) Have you ever been denied employment?
  - c) Have you ever had any racial or ethnic slurs directed at you?
  - d) Were there any bars, restaurants or clubs that Blacks were not allowed to attend or enter?
- 4) How did you personally deal with it?
- 5) How did the community as a whole deal with it?
- 6) Has St. Philip's helped you to deal with these things?
  - a) How? How not?
- 7) Do you think that Bishop Waterman helps with these things?
  - Reward in some way?

### *General Questions*

- 1) What was it like growing up in the Pier?
- 2) What did you do for fun?
- 3) How do you think that the community has changed from when you were younger?
- 4) Do you think that the church played an important role in your life growing up?
  - a) Why?
- 5) Do you see the church playing the same role in the lives of young people today?
- 6) Does the church help you to meet new people?
- 7) What about keeping old friendships going?
- 8) How do you feel today about St. Philip's and Bishop Waterman?

9) Has this changed over the years?

10) Is there anything else that you would like to tell me either about your life in the Pier, attending St. Philip's or tell me an important point you think that I left out?

### *Family History*

I'd just like to ask a few more questions about your family, like your brothers and sisters and your children over the age of 18.

1) Could you go through each person and tell me the following:

a) Up to age 10 where did they live?

b) What church did they attend?

c) How often?

d) How old are they now?

e) Have they left the Pier?

f) How old were they when they left?

g) Why did they leave?

h) Where did they go?

i) Where do they live now?

j) What is their occupation?

k) What is the highest level of schooling they received?

l) What is their marital status?

m) Do you know if they still attend church services?

n) Do you know what denomination it is?

o) What was the religion of their spouse when they got married?

p) Has this changed since they got married?

- q) Do you know how often they attend?
- r) When they come home to visit to they attend services at St. Philip's?

**Appendix C**  
**List of Other Churches in Sydney Area**

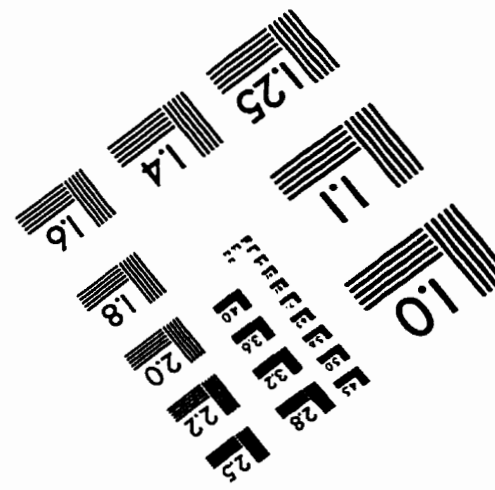
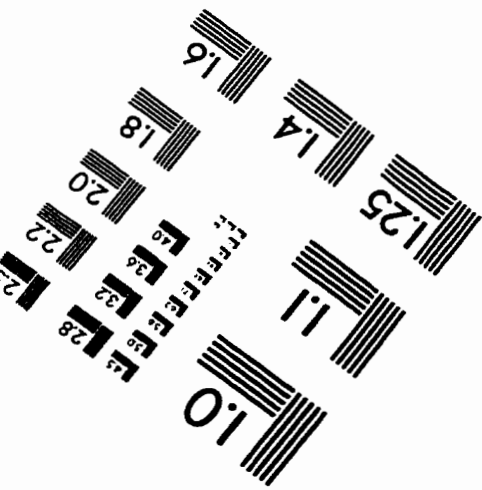
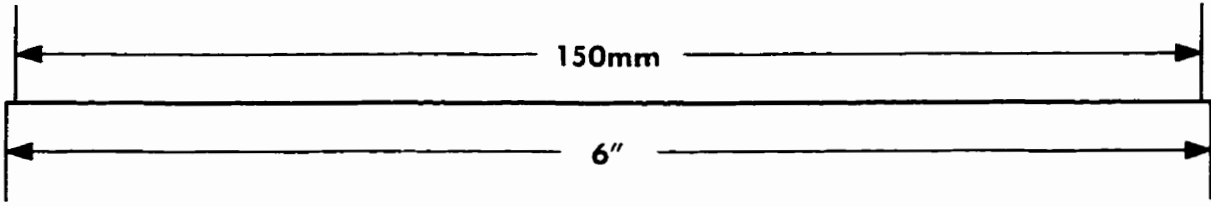
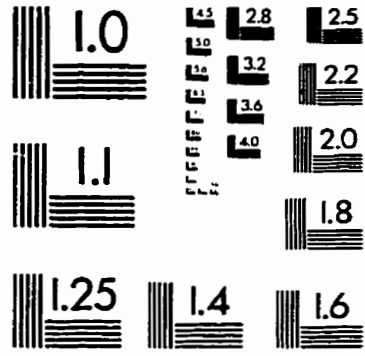
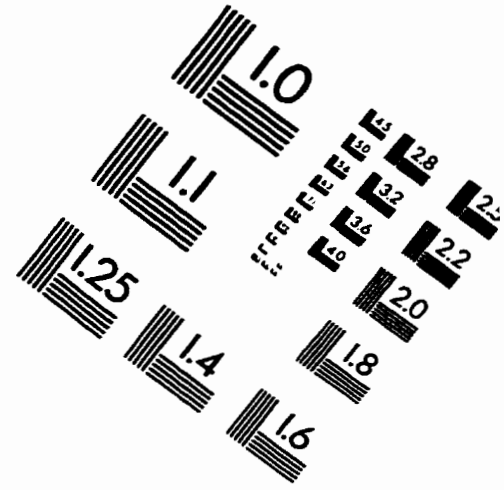
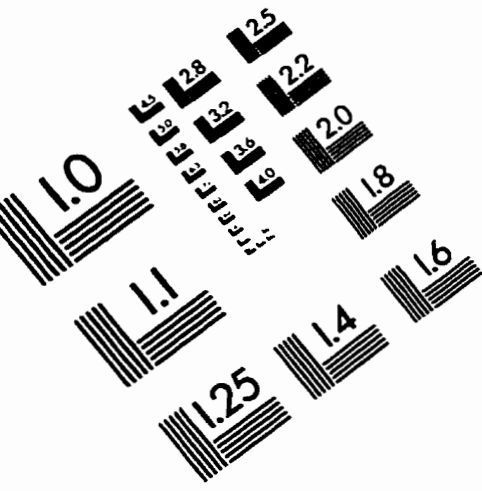
- 1) Holy Redeemer (Roman Catholic)
- 2) Christian Fellowship (Branch of Pentecostal)
- 3) Church of Jesus Christ and Latter Day Saints
- 4) Trinity United Church
- 5) Pentecostal Church
- 6) St. Alban's Anglican Church
- 7) Faith Baptist Church
- 8) Jehovah's Witness

**Appendix D****Chronological List of Rectors of St. Philip's**

- |                             |                |
|-----------------------------|----------------|
| 1) William Ernest Robertson | June 1921      |
| 2) Arthur Stanley Trotman   | June 1922      |
| 3) Dixon Egbert Philips     | November 1925  |
| 4) James Adolphous Ford     | April 1936     |
| 5) Antony Rafael Jones      | July 1938      |
| 6) George A. Francis        | September 1940 |
| 7) Vincent Waterman         | February 1982  |

(Source: Beaton Institute Archives)

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