

## **WITNESS STATEMENT OF REV. PAUL CLARKSON**

I am writing in support of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms challenge of Bill Hulet, in the matter of the Ignatius Jesuit Centre in Guelph, and the proposed commercial development on the northwest corner of Woodlawn Road and Woolwich Street in Guelph, Ontario.

As an Ordained Minister in the United Church of Canada, and as a resident of Guelph who has used the Ignatius Jesuit Centre on many occasions for Spiritual nurture, I have serious concerns about the compatibility of the Centre and the proposed development. In addition, I feel strongly that by allowing the proposed development to go forward, the quality of my experience at the Centre will be negatively affected by an increase in noise, traffic, and smog. In addition, the two Cemeteries abutting these lands will be adversely affected by these same negative affects.

I have been an Ordained Minister for the past 16 years, 6 of which have been spent serving a congregation in the City of Guelph, and previous to that in neighbouring, Kitchener. It was during my time in Kitchener that I first became acquainted with the Ignatius Jesuit Centre. Shortly after my arrival in Kitchener, I became a member of a nondenominational Clergy support group, which met at the Centre. At that time, for approximately 3 years, I was not familiar at all with the land, only the buildings on the site. It has been since by move to Guelph that I have become familiar with the land at the Centre, and the Spiritual quality of the entire centre.

For me the Centre is a place, which best combines the two central aspects of my faith. First, it is a place of prayer and meditation. This is important, for although the positive spiritual energy that exists at the Centre cannot be measured scientifically, it is palatable just the same. For me God is not detached from us, and somehow “out there” but within each one of us, and the Centre, with its emphasis on Ignatian prayer and contemplation helps me to nurture that part of my Spiritual journey. The centre has been the source of Ignatian Spirituality and has helped to spread this practice throughout congregations in the City of Guelph, including the one I serve.

The other central aspect of my faith is to see God not only within me, and within others, but in all of the created order – plants, animals, insects, - all of nature. Once again the Centre is a place which on many occasions has nurtured this part of my spiritual life. I recall a misty fall morning walking across a lane between a freshly plowed field and a pasture field. The only sound heard being the sounds of a world waking up from its slumber, birds and insects starting their busy day. I recall standing in the sunset beside a statue of St. Ignatius watching the sun dip below a hill, spotted with Black Angus cattle. Alternatively, a hot summer afternoon, spent in the shade of huge maple with friends and fellow travelers on “the way”. There have been others, and through all of these experiences, spent in the quiet beauty of this place, that place between the physical world of our senses, and the inner world of the spirit, became one.

I have also conducted many burial services in Woodlawn Cemetery during the past six years. Again, with these experiences the quiet beauty of this sacred space touched me. Although surrounded by commercial developments and busy streets, Woodlawn Cemetery is a quiet oasis where families and friends can gather in peace to pay their last respects and say “good-bye”, to their loved one. In addition to performing burials, on one occasion I met a friend for lunch at Woodlawn Cemetery and in the quiet of that sacred space he shared the struggles and challenges of his life, with me and with God.

In our tradition, in The United Church of Canada, we have a line in one of our Creeds that reminds us, “to live with respect in Creation.” This reminder of our connection with the good earth was given to us by our First-nations brothers and sisters. The centrality of the earth, and of creation, is one of the tenants of our faith that we are becoming increasingly aware of. Through our connection with the earth, and our sacred spaces, we connect with our Creator, and touch “the Holy”. The loss, or degradation, of our sacred spaces impedes our ability to explore fully this area of our faith, and spiritual journey.