

Dear Friends,

As of Wednesday, December 1st, I officially retired from King's, and Nick and Vanessa have resigned from their positions at the College as well. I want to reassure you, however, that while we are leaving King's, we are certainly not leaving Halifax. We are excited about the time and freedom this change will give us to focus on building the Cathedral music program and further developing Capella Regalis. Our aim, as always, is to continue to offer the highest quality choral music to the community. As Director of Music at the Cathedral, I am blessed not only with a beautiful building and magnificent pipe organ, but also with the gracious support and encouragement of the Dean, staff, and congregation. The Cathedral Choir, consisting entirely of singers I have trained (many of whom came through the Chapel Choir) is a joy to work with.

I am so thankful to you for your interest and patronage over the years. Your enthusiastic response to our programs has been uplifting and affirming. Simply out of gratitude I feel it incumbent on me to offer an explanation for this abrupt change following fourteen years building the Chapel music program.

My initial acquaintance with King's came through my daughters Samantha and Vanessa, and my son-in-law Shay Burkhart, who enrolled in the Foundation Year Program for the academic year 1998/99. (Our family had been coming to Nova Scotia's South Shore every summer since the mid-eighties, so the kids were already smitten with the place.) I learned about their life at King's over the course of many lengthy phone calls. It was clear that they were entirely absorbed in their studies. I heard a little about their extra-curricular activities, but it was the exhaustive reading list, the lectures and tutorials and the wonderful informal exchanges with other students and professors that really got them excited. It sounded to me like the whole college was alive with philosophical debate and heated discussions that would continue well into the wee hours. Samantha recalls shopping at the Atlantic Superstore on Quinpool when she heard loud voices coming from the produce section. She found two of her professors voicing their differences on certain approaches to Heidegger while deciding between arugula and spinach.

I visited once in January of that academic year and was privileged to sit in on a Dante lecture by Dr Robert Crouse. Prince Hall was filled to overflowing, not just with students but with faculty as well. I was amazed to see such collegiality. The atmosphere was electric. I returned home, a convert, an ambassador, evangelizing to anyone who would listen.

Seven years later, my wife Meg and I visited Halifax to meet with the President and some faculty members at King's, the music committee at St. George's Round Church, and the President of Atlantic School of Theology. These institutions had come together to create a three-part position to make it possible for us to move here from Connecticut. Towards the end of our visit we met Fr Gary Thorne, Chaplain at King's. That was the clincher. I gave my employer and colleagues in Connecticut a year's notice, helping them to find my replacement, and we moved to Nova Scotia in the summer of 2007.

Over the course of the next fourteen years the Chapel Choir developed into a first-class ensemble presenting the great masterworks, both in liturgies and concerts, at a musical level that was quite astonishing. Largely through the "King's at the Cathedral" series of concerts, the choir developed a wide following both locally and internationally and attracted students to King's who were keen to sing in such an ensemble. In the years when the CBC recorded live shows in the Maritimes, our concerts were broadcast nationally, and I heard from folks across the country who were so pleased that such music was emanating from Halifax. Our large and growing audience was a revelation to me: so attentive, such intelligent listeners and such fearless singers on those hymns and carols!

Although modelled on those at Oxbridge colleges, the King's choir developed an added richness because of its deep involvement in the life of the Chapel. Many of the choristers over the years were Chapel wardens, servers or acolytes, and four of the recent Chapel Administrators came from the ranks of the choir. We organized the choir's schedule so that choristers could participate in Chapel retreats and trips and visits to other communities. Many of the King's students attended our concerts as ushers or stage crew or just to experience a St. John Passion or Monteverdi "Vespers" for the first time. The integration of Choir and

Chapel into the life of the College was an obsession with Fr Thorne. Under his leadership the counter-cultural nature of the Chapel community became a home for countless numbers of students looking for 'real', searching for meaningful friendship, and hoping for the transcendent.

Singing in an ensemble like the Chapel Choir requires a great deal of its members; commitment, intense listening, discernment, courage, humility, and a willingness to give of oneself in the larger interests of the group. Each individual is asked to develop their skills to the highest level while simultaneously attending to the overriding power of the whole ensemble. Over the course of fifty years training choirs, I have found this 'culture' to be a powerful educational model. What is required of members of a top-notch choir is exactly what is required of members of a vitally engaged society.

Over the past several years I have felt that the King's administration has moved the college from a courageous place of learning that stood firmly on the side of rigorous discourse and debate, to a more mainstream institution where students are seen not as potential contributors to society but as potential victims of that society. With the arrival of the pandemic, this movement has accelerated. In the past, King's was a place where students, by being challenged within a true community, were supported in the transition from childhood to adulthood. Today, adulthood seems to have been postponed.

In early October, Vanessa, Nick, and I met with the senior administration at King's. That meeting was disturbing. I had no idea how utterly dissatisfied those in the administration were with my leadership of the Chapel Music Program. I learned for the first time that they had no confidence in my judgment as Director of Music. It was clear that a parting of the ways was inevitable and rather than prolong the separation process, I decided, with Nick and Vanessa, to draw our time at King's to a close.

So now we move on, and I am very excited about the possibilities. Capella Regalis Men & Boys Choir, which Nick founded in 2010, is coming through this difficult Covid period remarkably well. Aside from the largest number of new probationers (the youngest boys getting trained) in its history, Capella Regalis has no fewer than twenty-three men on the roster, eleven of whom are former boy choristers. And in the spring, Capella Regalis plans to launch the Girls Choir program, which Vanessa will direct.

I will continue holding forth at the Cathedral (with Nick and Vanessa) where we hope to build a regular season of concerts into the choir's schedule alongside the 'Sundays at Four' series, the Sunday morning liturgies, and other special services. Give a listen to this excerpt from the recent Evensong at the Cathedral on October 31st – capellaregalis.com/video/magnificat-st-pauls-service-h-howells. I think you will agree that, if this is the shape of things to come, we have every reason to be excited.

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter. I look forward to seeing you at upcoming events at the Cathedral.

With gratitude,



Paul
