

A PAGE FROM THE LONG AND  
AMAZING HISTORY OF ST. STEPHEN  
AND THE INCARNATION EPISCOPAL CHURCH

# Anti-Drug Vigil



In the 1980s, the crack epidemic resulted in many open-air drug markets in DC. One of the largest was on Newton Street. The night of December 12, 1988, **two young men involved in the drug trade were shot and killed** in front of the doors of St. Stephen's Church.

**A VIGIL FOR THE NEIGHBORHOOD**  
Light a candle with St. Stephen's people and others who care about our neighborhood. Join a candlelight vigil on the church steps, Friday, December 16. Evening prayer at 7:30pm in the church, vigil from 8pm to midnight. Bring blankets, hot drinks, and candles.

Coincidentally, Parish administrator Comfort Grandi and other parishioners had planned an **anti-drug vigil** for four nights later. That vigil took on added importance after the killings.

## From the Rector

Dear Vigilers,  
Many thanks to all of you who came to the Vigil last Friday night. About sixty people were on our front steps: parishioners, neighborhood people, and television crews! Father Roman from Sacred Heart Church joined us as did Carter Echols from the Samaritan Ministry. It was very cold but we were there.  
Special thanks to all who planned this event - especially Ronald Stolk, Comfort Grandi, and Vivian McFarland. And, if you couldn't join this vigil, there will be others.

### But the one-time vigil didn't end the problem.

Drug trafficking continued on Newton Street, in the church parking lot, and around the church. Washington Free clinic volunteers and patients were robbed after evening clinics. In April, 1989, Grandi tried again.

Therefore, beginning at 8:00pm Sunday, April 2, I will try to sit on the front steps of the church every night for as long as those young people are out there. I hope that those of you who want to do something will come too, and that eventually we can be out there 24 hours a day.

The vigil had results. Drug trafficking stopped around the church during those hours. Police paid more attention, often having an officer present at the vigil. Neighbors formed stronger bonds. In September, 1989, a celebration was held on the church steps to mark **six months of nightly vigils on the church steps.**

**The Vigil took hold.** Parishioners and neighbors began gathering on the church steps every night from 8-11pm. Vivian McFarland wrote about her experience in BREAD.

The first night they threw eggs at us. We were subsequently told that the teenagers often participate in egg battles. Perhaps our first night's experience was an initiation of sorts. We are a motley bunch of parishioners, friends, neighbors and relatives who have been spared further such harassment as we pursue our aim: to discourage the sale of illegal drugs on church property. For five weeks now we have been sitting on the front steps and patrolling the sides of the church, seven nights a week, even in the cold and in the rain. Yet our hearts have been warmed by the encouragement of those who stop by to lend their support to our efforts.

## Newton Street's 'Dance with the Drug Dealers' Truce Evolves from D.C. Church's Vigil

In the beginning it was about bearing witness, plain and simple. Every night for six months they've taken turns, about a hundred of them, keeping a vigil on the steps of St. Stephen and the Incarnation Church in Northwest Washington. There was a concern about drug dealing on church property, vials of crack stashed behind the yellow pansies in the two flowerpots that flank the church steps; about the safety of parishioners and others coming to the church at night. The vigil started after two drug-related shootings on Newton Street last December.

It is not for drama or publicity. The vigil is not "Just Say No," not waving a bag of crack on national television and not demanding a greater police presence. It is not about evoking some righteous genie to drive away bad Mr. Crack. For the Episcopal parishioners of St. Stephen's, the continuing vigil on the steps of their church is about building community, a way of saying, "We have faith, we're here to stay and we care."

-Jill Nelson, *The Washington Post*, September 20, 1989

The Vigil soon ended. Drug trafficking continued. But, as the Post reported, the Vigil said to the dealers and our neighbors **"We have faith, we're here to stay and we care."**

WIDENING THE CIRCLE THE CAMPAIGN FOR ST. STEPHEN'S