

A SERMON ON THE RETIREMENT OF THE
HON. MAUREEN MACDONALD

St. Mark's Church, Halifax – Sunday, June 12, 2016

By the Rev. John Keith Morrell, Rector

We are all here today to honour our distinguished colleague, politician and friend --- Maureen MacDonald. This invitation to honour Maureen by a church service and a reception is to give the local community that she has served for 18 years the opportunity to say THANK YOU. Maureen has been involved with the outreach programs of St. Mark's and Ward 5, which operates out of our Community Centre, for all the time she has been our MLA. Whether at a Remembrance Sunday celebration, the Jubilate Concerts which we sponsor to raise funds for Christmas boxes for needy families, to a dramatic reading at our Titanic Memorial Concert in 2012, to numerous dinners and other events in the Community Centre, Maureen has been a welcome presence amongst us. We will all miss this active participation of our local MLA. Whoever is elected to fill her shoes has a long history and tradition of service to live up to.

Following her schooling in Antigonish and a Bachelor of Arts degree from St. Francois Xavier University, Maureen continued her educational and career endeavors, receiving a Masters in Social Work from Dalhousie University and PH. D from Warwick University in the United Kingdom.

I suppose, given her retirement from Public office, we now have to refer to her as Doctor Maureen MacDonald. As Social Worker and Professor, she felt that call to public service and first offered herself as a Candidate for Halifax-Needham in the March 1998 Provincial Election. She not only won her seat in that election, but in 5 succeeding elections up to and including October, 2013. Not satisfied to be a backbencher NDP member of the NS Legislature, Maureen received appointments as Minister of Health and Minister of Finance under the previous NDP Government.

With her party losing power in October 2013, Maureen turned her energies to the Provincial NDP, acting as Leader in the House and Acting Leader until February of this year.

Being a politician, a member of a government in power, and a Minister with different portfolios, requires an immense amount of work of the incumbent, mostly at the expense of family and personal time. Her important work parallels in many ways what I and others do as ministers of the Gospel, pastors and priests.

The World Book Dictionary defines minister as 1. A clergy person serving a church. 2. A person given charge of a department of a government. 3. An archaic meaning is a servant or attendant. 4. The act of ministering is to serve, to give comfort or aid, to be helpful, to contribute.

To serve, to give comfort, to aid, to be helpful, to contribute are all attributes that Maureen brought to her work in government.

While living in Lebanon in the late 1960's as a student at the American University of Beirut and the Near East School of Theology, I was introduced to the works of Lebanon's most famous poet and author, Khalil Gibran. He lived at the turn of the 20th century prior to and through the first World War. Gibran was a Maronite Christian born in a village near Mount Lebanon, a region that has produced many prophets. Millions of speakers of Arabic were familiar with his writings and considered him the genius of his age. He lived at a time when the secular government authorities and leaders of the church conspired to keep the majority of people poor and uneducated. He spoke out against this injustice and was forced to flee the country of his birth.

He made the United States his home for the last 20 years of his life, and began to write in English. His most famous book, THE PROPHET and his other books of prose and poetry,

illustrated with his own mystical drawings, are known and loved by people around the world who find in them an expression of the deepest impulses of the human heart and mind.

He said this about WORK

You work that you may keep pace with the earth and the soul of the earth. For to be idle is to become a stranger unto the seasons, and to step out of life's procession that marches in Majesty and proud submission towards the infinite.

All work is empty, save when there is love; and when you work with love, you bind yourself to yourself, and to one another, and to God.

And what is it to work with love?

It is to weave the cloth with threads drawn from your heart

It is to build a house with affection

It is to sow seeds with tenderness and reap the harvest with joy....

Work is love made visible.

To serve, to give comfort, to aid, to be helpful, to contribute ...

Maureen, through your work amongst us, we thank you for making love visible.

Let us pray God of mystery and power, open our eye to the flame of your love, and open our ears to the thunder of your justice, that we may receive your gifts of blessing and peace, to the glory of your name. AMEN.