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A section of the Anglican Journal



NIAGARA ANGLICAN

A Gathering Place and a Sounding Board for the People of the Diocese of Niagara — Since 1955



MAY 2024

Come, Holy Spirit,

fill the hearts of your faithful;
and kindle in us the fire of
your love.

In other words

Open to the Spirit

a children's story

JOHN BOWEN

On the first day of Pentecost, the disciples were all filled with the Holy Spirit, we are told in the Book of Acts. But it's a funny image, isn't it, human beings as empty containers which need to be filled by a substance from outside? We don't generally think of ourselves that way.

One useful principle of Bible study is to see what words mean when they are used in different contexts. So I was curious to know how Luke, the author of Acts, uses the idea of being "filled" elsewhere in his book. The answer was illuminating.

On different occasions, Luke talks about people being filled with other things—specifically, with jealousy, or joy, or rage. Now that I can understand. I've experienced it, and so have you. Any time someone is filled with a strong emotion, we know about it. Their whole being changes—their facial expression, their body language, their words. It is obvious to anyone close by that the particular emotion is dominating their personality for the time being. "Boy," we might report later, "I have seen anyone so completely joyful (or jealous, or angry). It was amazing!"

So when we come to think about what it means to be "filled with the Holy Spirit," presumably Luke has something similar in mind. To be filled with the Spirit, as he sees it, is to be under the control of the Holy Spirit. Now perhaps that sounds creepy, even dehumanising:



to be under the control of an outside force? So let me tell you a story that might help.

Children's talks are always the most memorable. So, although I heard this children's talk over forty years ago, I have never forgotten it. It was about the Holy Spirit, and it continues to help me every time Pentecost approaches.

Andrew, the curate, placed on a table in the middle of the church a pitcher of water and several Mason jars of different sizes. First, he picked up the smallest jar, and poured water into it until it was full. The children watched with bated breath to see if it would overflow. The speaker knew what he was about, and to their delight it did.

Then he said something like this: This small jar is ourselves when we first realise what it means to follow Jesus. Someone said, "Christianity means giving as much as we know of ourselves to as much as we know of Jesus," and I like that. At first, we may not know much about Jesus; we may not know a lot about ourselves either, but that's OK. Jesus fills with his Spirit as much as we offer.

Then, said Andrew, we grow.

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Image: iStock/modera76

Annual Retreat Gathers Clergy & Lay Workers

At the end of May, Bishop Susan Bell will host Archbishop Chris Harper as the featured guest and speaker at this year's annual retreat for clergy and licensed lay workers.

Archbishop Harper was installed last year to the office of National Indigenous Anglican Archbishop of the Anglican Church of Canada and Presiding Elder of the Sacred Circle. In this role, he has pastoral oversight over all Indigenous Anglicans, bringing years of ministry experience and a passion for

walking together on the journey of truth and reconciliation. Over the course of the two-day retreat, participants will have an opportunity to learn from the archbishop, hear more about the emerging Indigenous Anglican Church in Canada, and explore how they can continue to foster the work of truth and reconciliation.

Two books are being recommended as preparatory reading and Bishop Bell commends these to all in advance of June's National Indigenous History

month: *A National Crime: The Canadian Government and the Residential School System, 1879 to 1986* by John S. Milloy and *Truth Telling: Seven Conversations About Indigenous Life in Canada* by Michelle Good.

In addition to plenary sessions, clergy and lay workers will share in regular times of prayer and fellowship.

Archbishop Chris Harper

Photo: Anglican Journal



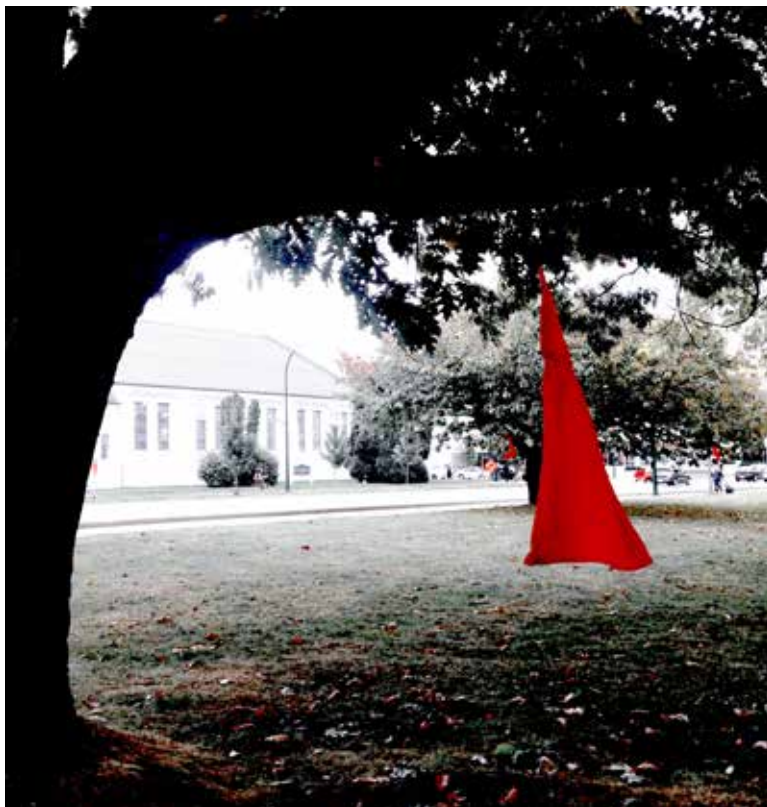
Red Dress Alert System

DEIRDRE PIKE

In advance of Canada's National Day for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) on May 5, there are a number of actions the country is taking to try and change the reality of this tragic story. The day, also known as Red Dress Day, commemorates the release of the MMIWG report back in May of 2019.

Member of Parliament Leah Gazan, has met success with her request for the implementation of a national Red Dress Alert system for missing Indigenous women, girls and two-spirit people. The system would work in a similar way to the Amber Alert system for missing children.

Gazan first urged the government to support a system for alerting the public to a missing Indigenous woman, girl, or two-spirit person, in February 2023. She wrote a letter to the



A red dress art installation calling attention to MMIWG, held at Seaforth Peace Park, Vancouver, BC.

Image: Edna Winti/Flickr CC, via thecanadianencyclopedia.ca

Minister of Public Safety Marco Mendicino informing him of the disproportionate number of Indigenous people who go missing compared to non-Indigenous. The government followed up by adding money into that year's budget to explore this system.

On March 19, the Status of Women Committee began a study into how best to implement the alert. The committee will hear from family members, survivors, and grassroots leaders to provide recommendations to the government.

This work comes on the heels of February's remembrance days of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls and 2SLGBTQI+ people, often coinciding with February 14, otherwise known as Valentine's Day.

In Niagara-on-the-Lake, empty red dresses hung throughout the city, organized by Brock University as a Red Dress awareness day. In Hamilton, people gathered to remember Helen Gillings, an Indigenous woman who was murdered in 1995. A new temporary plaque of remembrance was unveiled to honour her on the lamppost in the alley-

way where she was last seen. The plaque will soon be made permanent.

The Anglican Church of Canada continues to call for the 231 Calls to Justice to be completed and has a liturgy for MMIWG which could be used for holding vigil on May 5.

KAIROS Canada, of which the Anglican Church of Canada is a member, made a public call last August for Manitoba to search the landfill for Morgan Harris and Mercedes Myran whose remains are believed to be in the Prairie Green Landfill. The province of Manitoba has since committed \$20 million to carry out the search.

For more information, go to the *MMIWG Info-Hub on KAIROS* <https://www.kairoscanada.org/missing-murdered-indigenous-women-girls>

If you would like to host a *KAIROS Blanket Exercise* in your parish to learn more about *MMIWG, Indigenous peoples, and their treatment in this part of Turtle Island*, please email Deirdre at deirdre.pike@niagaraanglican.ca

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Memories Ignited by Return to YLTP

DONNA ELLIS

The Youth Leadership Training Program (YLTP) is one of the flagship offerings for diocesan children, youth, and family ministry (CYFM). This year, I had the privilege of joining the leadership team as a coordinator.

It has been many years since I walked alongside a group of young people through the 3-year program, and this past March break brought back so many wonderful memories at the beautiful property of Canterbury Hills. My many years spent as the CYFM coordinator for St. John's Ancaster, and previous experience leading a YLTP cohort, equipped me to lead the volunteers through the planning process and delivery of the program. The five-day event welcomed 25 individuals into a community of prayer, leadership development and spiritual exploration, and self-discovery.

The role of coordinator is a very different role from what I had experienced in the past. The program runs from Sunday of March break to Wednesday, however, my role started long before to help create the experiences and activities the youth

would take part in. Our goal is to help the young people develop their leadership skills, find their gifts, recognize the gifts in others and work together as a team.

As Christian leaders we do our best to emulate the leadership of Jesus. We use biblical stories of Jesus to discuss and identify the leadership traits Jesus embodied and how He helped mentor and guide the disciples to be followers and listen to where God is calling them to lead. At YLTP, we looked at how God sometimes seems to call the least likely to leadership.

The 1st year group had fun looking at and discussing the "anointing of David" in 1st Samuel. They also began to learn about their own personality traits and the traits of others and how that applies to leadership. The 2nd year group focused more on working together as a team and the importance of being in community. They discuss how Jesus didn't travel alone but travelled within community of least likely disciples whom He taught and sent out together to share the Good News. The 3rd year group focused on practical communication skills and identified



Images: Contributed by Donna Ellis

the leadership styles they bring into community, and areas for personal growth.

All groups also look at how Jesus took care of himself and how we can do the same. We encourage each cohort to prepare a morning devotion using a story of Jesus showing leadership, plan a social event, and prepare a time of prayer. The third-year cohort also are responsible for planning the final Eucharist with guidance from the clergy team leader.

This year we invited several guests to share their gifts and skills and engage the youth. Adventure Works, who specialize in training and professional development lead team building activities through low ropes courses and partner challenges. Canterbury Hills Camp Director Sharon Miller along with a member of the resource team lead campfire songs and activities during the evening schedule. We were delighted to welcome Bishop Susan Bell, who spent a great deal of time discussing her faith story and vision for missional leadership across the diocese. She encouraged the youth to identify their passions and to watch and listen to where the Spirit is at work within their parishes, communi-

ties, and schools. She also joined us for a build your own sub lunch! Deidre Pike, the diocesan program consultant for justice and outreach, and placement student, Raul Guerrero came to engage the youth in the work of Communion Forrest. They engaged the youth by traveling around the property of Canterbury Hills in groups to identify trees, measure the circumference of the trunks, judge the health of the tree, and assess the condition of it.

The youth shared with us through their evaluations that their favorite highlights included the candle lit worship, community wide game of volleyball, the pasta dinner, campfires, spider dogs, and late-night snacks. They also shared that they were most surprised at

the fact they were able to make new friends in such a short period of time. Their feedback is a reminder to us just how important these youth ministry events truly are, as they provide a space for young people to gather, connect with others, explore faith, and just be.

I feel blessed to have been among such a dedicated leadership team that helped to make this event a success. I give thanks to Matt Gillard, Steph Doan, Nesta Cooper, Emily Hill, David Anderson, and Sarah Bird for their faithful service, passion for youth ministry, care, and energy that helped to make YLTP 2024 a huge success!

To learn more about CYFM ministry visit: <https://niagaraanglican.ca/cyfm>



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Publisher: Bishop Susan Bell
905-527-1316
bishop@niagaraanglican.ca
Editor: Connor Jay (On leave)
Interim Editor: Archdeacon Bill Mous
editor@niagaraanglican.ca
Advertising: Angela Rush
905-630-0390
niagara.anglican.ads@gmail.com
Proofreader: Wendy Leigh Bell

Art Director/Layout: Craig Fairley
Imagine Creative Communications
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Mailing address:
Cathedral Place
252 James Street North
Hamilton Ontario L8R 2L3

For a complete staff directory and more information, visit the diocesan website: niagaraanglican.ca



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**CALLED TO LIFE
COMPELLED TO LOVE**

The Evolution of Family Friday

THE REV. DEACON NANCY MCBRIDE

For a few years now, the parish of St. Paul's in Caledonia has offered a children's program called Family Friday. In the early days, the event, called Messy church, was held quarterly on a Saturday or Sunday afternoon. The name failed to resonate so we started calling the time 'Thank God, It's Family Friday' or TGIFF. When we came out of the pandemic restrictions, the program took the simpler name of Family Friday.

In January 2023, the current version of Family Friday began. We offer seasonally themed monthly events on a Friday evening from 5:00 to 7:00 p.m. We attract about 25 people each session. The energy level is high!

Let's pause for a moment to discuss families, because they come in all shapes and sizes, and so do ours. We have one little boy, who brings his mother, his grandmother, two great aunts, and a cousin or two. A mom and dad, two children family brings their neighbors, a single parent dad and his daughter. Recently, two families from a neighbouring church have joined us. We'll see one parent with each family each time because the other parent is at work. We have people with no family. We have a grandad who bring his grandson. We have a blended family, with stepbrothers, and stepsisters. Sometimes they bring their grandparents. We have two people ready to be grandparents whenever their children get around to it! We are open to everyone, regardless of race, colour or creed.

The format has remained the same since the beginning 10 years ago: a story, a seasonal craft, an activity and a meal. During the very first session, the children built their own advent wreath from a Styrofoam circle, battery operated tea lights and decorations of ribbon and artificial greens. This past year, we planted a tree, learned about indigenous culture through stories and crafts, and assembled an inukshuk beside our peace pole.

Perhaps our most popular event happens at Halloween when each child carves a pumpkin. The Pumpkin Prayer is a good guide, with some children carving fish, or the word love.



Emma, Ivan, Ryan and Kaine with Deacon Nancy McBride,

Photo: Contributed by Nancy McBride

One year, we had a contest to see who could carve the best religious themed jack-o'-lantern. The children's efforts were showcased during the Sunday worship.

During the pandemic, several craft and story packages were delivered to our families. The first Christmas, the family built a gingerbread house, which was shown off during a Zoom meeting when the Christmas story was told by the rector. One Easter, the children received a lamb to assemble with pom-poms, felt ears and tails, with googly eyes. Jesus is the Good Shepherd!

This past Advent, the families received an Advent calendar. In week one, the family assembled and decorated an advent wreath, (a salt and flour clay base with coloured birthday candles). For weeks two and four, children decorated a peace dove and a star to add to their Christmas tree. In week three, they learned the story of the origin of the candy cane, receiving a box of candy canes and the instruction to share them with family and friends! Each week, they received a story letter from the

rector and me.

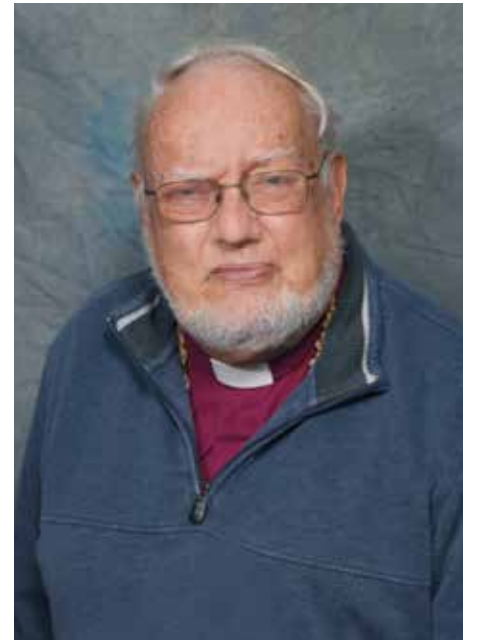
For Holy Week, the families received a collection of 12 numbered boxes accompanied by a story package giving a bible reading and some background and context. On opening the first box, they found a donkey and colt, a strip of ribbon representing a cloak, and a palm leaf. As the week progressed, a new box is opened, revealing money and doves, a bag of coins, a rooster, a crown of thorns, a cross and a stone, among other trinkets. This idea is not mine, and I have freely borrowed from and expanded on the Resurrection Eggs product, which I have always admired. Our version is called 'A lot can happen in eight days.'

To run an event like Family Friday, one needs volunteers! Some assemble the craft materials, some arrange and serve the meal, some bake and some clean up. As my own family says, 'it takes a village'. We could not run the program without them.

Bishop Terry Brown: 1944-2024

Bishop Terry Brown, retired bishop of Malaita, died over the Easter weekend.

Ordained in 1974 in the Diocese of Fredericton, he served a number of ministries, including as a divinity tutor and instructor at Trinity College and Asia/Pacific mission coordinator for the Anglican Church of Canada, before being elected to serve as the fourth Bishop of Malaita in the Anglican Church of Melanesia. He served in this role from 1996 through 2008 when he retired back to Hamilton.



In retirement, he served as associate priest of

All Saints, Hamilton, as

bishop-rector of The Church of the Ascension, Hamilton, and more recently as an honorary assistant of Christ's Church Cathedral.

Bishop Terry faithfully served the Diocese of Niagara, the Anglican Church of Canada, and the wider Anglican Communion throughout his five decades of ordained ministry.

Please hold Bishop Terry's family, friends, and colleagues in your prayers as they mourn.

A service to celebrate his life will be held on Friday, May 3 at 1:00 p.m. at Christ's Church Cathedral in Hamilton, with visitation beginning at Noon.

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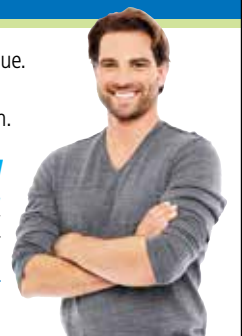


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What's This Room For?

THE REVEREND ANDREW RAMPTON

There I was on a Tuesday morning, preparing for worship in the Chapel of St. John the Evangelist at the University of Manitoba when I heard the chatter of voices. I saw, just inside the chapel, a group of people, probably undergrads, looking around. I introduced myself as the chaplain, welcomed them to the space, mentioned the upcoming liturgy, and invited them to look around.

I continued to get ready for worship, wondering if they'd stick around for the service, ask questions about the windows, the organ, or maybe the tilework around the font. A few minutes passed and one of the students approached me on behalf of the group. Excited for the conversation that was about to begin, I waited for the question. What came was not what I was expecting.

"What's this room for?"

Right. I realized quickly my poor assumption. These folks aren't interested in the organ or the windows or the font. They walked into a very large room that was obviously built for a



Image: rupertsland.ca

purpose, what with the strange furniture and decorations and the huge wooden man hanging from the ceiling on a metal cross. But they had no point of reference for a chapel or a chaplain or even Christianity.

We had an engaging and interesting conversation, but it centred on questions about whether or not these young folks had thought about things spiritual, whether they believed that they had spiritual aspects like their physical and mental aspects, and their (very minimal) experience with religion in general. When I approach conversa-

tions with people who aren't regular churchgoers, I mentally prepare for the possibility of discussions about religious trauma, "church hurt", ongoing scandals, and painful histories. None of these were present on this morning.

It's not that these smart, well-connected, media-savvy, worldly young adults were uninterested or standoffish about things Christian. It's that, in their twenty or so years of living, they'd never brushed up against the Church or anyone identifiable as Christian. They had no more frame of reference for me—as a priest and chaplain—the chapel, or the Church as most fish have for bicycles. There was no hostility or even hesitancy about being with me or entering the space. This strange room of unclear purpose and I were simply brand new information and experience for them.

In my now 25 years in the Anglican Church I have been part of many conversations about evangelism, missions, recruitment, and all of the other language that we use to describe this sort of conversation. Nearly every one of those conversations has focused

on conversation with people who were, at one time, part of the church to return to it. Speaking to the dechurched. In the few conversations I have heard about speaking to the unchurched—those who have never been part of the church—most of the talk is couched in Christendom thinking. The assumption that these people are aware of Christianity, the church, and have simply not heard the right invitation to persuade them that our local parish is the place for them. While we might be suffering the hangover of the centuries-long bender of Christendom, a rapidly-growing number of Canadians are unaware of what a church is, much less why they might consider being part of one.

Tara Isabella Burton, in *Strange Rites: New Religions for a Godless World* reminds us that we humans are hard-wired for spiritual practices. No matter how we frame them, whether it's church or a CrossFit routine, we will make religion for ourselves. Reginald Bibby, in his 2017 book on religion in Canada, *Resilient Gods: Being Pro-Religious, Low Religious, or No Religious in Canada* points out that while

participation in organized religion has declined over the past fifty years, Canadians' level of interest in spirituality has not much changed. We, the Church, have tools and traditions and wisdom and practices that people are desperate for. But we often seem unable to communicate that in a helpful way.

I am increasingly persuaded that the task of the 21st century evangelist is much more like that of the 1st century than any other period in Christian history. We will meet people for whom we are the first introduction to the church, Christianity, and Christ. Our task, in these conversations, is not an erudite description of the theological controversies of the 16th century, nor why the liturgical aesthetic and preaching of our parish are so obviously superior to those of the place next door. Instead, our task is to find words that share the good news of Jesus Christ, probably while explaining just what this room is for.

Andrew serves as the rector of St. John the Evangelist, Hamilton.

A Prayer Vigil for Peace

DEBORAH BOWEN

The church we go to is on a downtown street. The street was mostly built around 100 years ago. And so there are lots of churches.

When we walk to church, we pass the United church, the Canadian Reformed church, and the Catholic church, before we reach our own Anglican church. If we were to turn a little to our right at that point, we'd very quickly get to the Presbyterian church. If we go on past our church, we'd come to the Unitarian church, housed in a building that used to be a big hardware store.

That's a lot of churches. In the twenty-seven years we've lived in this downtown area, I can't remember any occasions when all six of those churches have done anything together. In fact, we rejoice when two or three get together for any cause—which at least seems scriptural.

But something happened last

month. The situation in Israel and Palestine is so dire and so appalling that some of the Christians on the street were feeling that we really have to be concerted in prayer. So, a group started planning and preparing for a prayer vigil. And they managed to get all six of those churches involved.

They thought about inviting the local Jewish synagogue and the local Muslim mosque to join too. But in the end they felt that, given the intense volatility and highly divisive feelings around the whole issue of the war in Gaza, this might just be too difficult, too likely to create a place for the expression of anger rather than peace.

My husband and I attended the prayer vigil. It was simple. There were no homilies or sermons or manifestos. There was music, and there were prayers, and there was silence. The music was led by a Catholic pianist, a Presbyterian viola-player, and an Anglican singer. Halfway

through the vigil we sang a Taizé chorus about love. The ministers of each of the churches in our immediate neighbourhood led the congregation in prayer.

The minister from the Unitarian church, in whose building we were meeting because the space was the easiest to use on such an occasion, welcomed us and led us in a prayer of invocation.

The Canadian Reformed pas-

tor led us in a prayer of lament.

The Anglican priest led us in a prayer of confession.

The Presbyterian minister led us in a prayer of intercession.

The Catholic priest led us in a prayer for peace, from Pope Francis.

The United Church minister led us in a prayer of benediction.

After each prayer there was time for silent reflection.

And that was it.



Image: Unsplash/Jon Tyson

Except that, in her final words of leave-taking, the Unitarian minister made a point of welcoming a local rabbi, whom she had noticed sitting quietly to the side of the congregation.

It was a powerful evening. Sure, there are all kinds of significant differences between the congregations represented at that vigil. I suspect the preparatory meetings between the ministers were not always easy or straightforward. But what happened that evening was vitally important. Everyone saw that the situation in Gaza is catastrophic. Everyone believed that making a united statement for peace was important. And perhaps everyone also understood that the one Person who can really hear the cries of our hearts is our Lord God, who calls us to peace. If we can't answer that call even on our own peaceful street, how can we expect it to be answered in the crisis-ridden places of the world?

Assistant Curates Reflect on Ministry

THE REVEREND MIKE DEGAN



It is a unique opportunity in the Church today to be an assistant curate. My work as curate of St. George's in St. Catharines is primarily the work that any deacon does. I preach and take my turn running sessions of our adult education group. I join in and support the work of a number of parish committees, and I volunteer in a number of capacities with the breakfast program that feeds people daily from the hall of our church. A large proportion of my week is taken up by interacting and visiting with parishioners. I tell people that I am paid to talk for fifteen minutes a week and the rest of the time I listen! St. George's is a large parish so we frequently have people in the hospital that need to be visited, parishioners who can't get to church anymore who appreciate a visit from the clergy as well as the happy opportunity to get to have a meal or a coffee with people to talk about their lives and our faith.

The work I do every week varies widely and encompasses a diverse number of tasks, however the weekly Sunday liturgies continually bring me back to the core of my vocation. Having the opportunity to fulfill my role in the liturgical action by proclaiming the Gospel, calling people to repentance and inviting people to share a sign of God's peace week by week recalls me to what I have been called to do as a deacon. And that is particularly important in the following days when I

am tethered to my computer or focused on administrative work. Putting on a clerical collar for the first time didn't leave much of an impression on me – to my surprise. It was wearing the stole for the first time when I realized the trust and responsibility that were being placed on me as well as the joy of having found the way in which God was calling me to participate in God's mission in the world.

While as a deacon I do the same work any other cleric does, as a curate I am doing that work as a new and inexperienced deacon, so I am doing it under supervision. I have the great benefit of two experienced and talented priests as supervisors, Canon Martha Tatarnic and Tom Vaughan, co-rectors of St. George's, St. Catharines. Having the opportunity to rely on their counsel and advice as I undertake the various tasks of ministry and further discern my vocation is invaluable and a great comfort and source of strength.

St. George's is a great teaching parish. The people know that they are having a hand in forming me for ministry and each in their own way are conscientious and caring in doing so. It takes a lot of effort and resources on the part of a parish to form a curate, especially as most of the benefit of that training will go to other parishes and other parish-

ioners. My supervisors and parishioners are putting a lot of work into me and my formation so that I may be better able to serve other people and other congregations of our Church and diocese in the years ahead. This is made possible because half of my salary is covered by the diocese's Differentiated Curacies Fund. As an Anglican I am so glad to see resources being put towards building up new clergy to serve our Church and God's people.

I am grateful that I have the opportunity to serve St. George's now and I am hopeful that the ways I am being formed now will in the future help me live into my calling and help the people that I will serve.

THE REVEREND MONICA ROMIG GREEN



I was and am absolutely delighted to be placed at Christ's Church Cathedral as the

assistant curate. Having lived in downtown Hamilton since fall of 2021, my husband and I had already been members of the congregation before my placement, so I was aware of what a vibrant and exciting church community it is.

Since I had the advantage of already being acquainted with the parish and its many ministries, I jumped into my curacy with enthusiasm and joy! My entrance to ordained ministry at the Cathedral was well-timed because the parish was then developing its Mission Action Plan. I began by getting well acquainted with the cathedral's specific goals for mission within the parish and surrounding neighbourhood. I was asked to take the lead on the adult faith formation goals – which we renamed spiritual growth due to my abiding interest and previous experience in this area of ministry. I have relished having a front-row seat as the cathedral community strives to express its love for God and our neighbours in its specifically discerned ways.

My day-to-day work is filled with all kinds of ministry, from the interpersonal to the administrative and from the liturgical to the practical. I love fulfilling the deacon's role in our parish, reading the Gospel during our services and making connections within the community. Several business owners on

James Street North now welcome me in for a chat whenever I stop by to ask them to post a flier for an upcoming cathedral community event.

I am truly blessed to have Dean Tim Dobbin as my rector and supervisor. He is very intentional about my ministry formation process, and I know that I am learning from the best. It can be a bit intimidating when I preach and he invites the whole congregation to give me helpful feedback. But I have learned that any nerves I feel have more to do with my insecurity than with the people who approach me. Most everyone's comments have been kind and genuinely helpful. I know that I have become a better preacher for it.

I am also blessed to be a beta tester for a new diocesan curacy process. This process provides me with clear structure for discerning specific learning goals for my curacy, broken into manageable and achievable action steps. Additionally, I am supported by not just my supervisor, but also a lay learning team composed of trusted members of the parish. These wise and knowledgeable souls help me see where I have grown and also where I still need learning and experience.

One of the requirements of the curacy process is a missional

Continued Page 7



The Reverend Monica Romig Green with Dean Tim Dobbin, during an outdoor worship service at the Cathedral.

Image: contributed by the Diocese of Niagara

Assistant Curates

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6

project I develop and execute over the course of my curacy. Just the work of determining what that project could be has been formational. After listening, praying, and discussing with my supervisor and Lay Learning Team, I have focused on providing spiritual support for our Cathedral Café ministry.

This past winter, the Cathedral Café drop-in program, aimed at supporting anyone street-involved, grew from six to over 40 hours a week, through the support of the City of Hamilton and St. Matthew's House. As the numbers of staff, volunteers, and guests grew, I noticed an increasing desire for more spiritual connection and support. I suggested altering our midday Eucharist service on Wednesdays to be more accessible for the Café. Together, our ministry team has developed a lovely service where we receive the prayer requests of interested

guests, volunteers, and staff and we all worship together as one. Additionally, after working with our Café staff to provide enough Bibles to meet the constant requests for them, I now co-lead a weekly Discovery Bible Study for anyone curious within the Cathedral Café community.

The Cathedral is one of the most exciting church communities I have ever had the joy to belong to. Every day, I find myself in new learning opportunities as I grow in my calling as an ordained minister of the Anglican Church. This would not be possible without the Differentiated Curacies Fund, which covers half of my salary. I am continually grateful for all the support I receive from both the diocese and the cathedral community, and I continually thank God for this wonderful opportunity to serve and grow.

About the Differentiated Curacies Fund

The curacies of both Mike and Monica have been supported, in part, by the diocesan Differentiated Curacies Fund, created from the sale of disestablished parish properties.

"This is an investment in the leadership of our diocese—which we will all benefit from over time," says Bishop Susan Bell.

The formation of a priest is the direct result of the nurturing of many parishes as well as teaching rectors, which takes significant resources to support them over many years. Curacies are an intense 18-to-24-month period of training for new clergy. Each assistant curate brings their own gifts and the blessing of the Spirit who has set them apart to exercise those gifts on behalf of the Church.

"We are investing our money in leadership development because we know—by the grace of God—that there is a future; and that it's going to be exciting, and that right-skilled leadership is a crucial part of it."

Please pray for those discerning a call to ordained ministry in the Church. If this might be you, visit: niagaraanglican.ca/ministry/vocations.

A Prayer for Vocations

God our hope, your risen Christ commissioned leaders to make disciples of all nations and baptize them to serve as a living testimony to his presence.

Raise up in this Province vocations to holy orders, individuals who will love you with their whole hearts and gladly spend their lives making you known; Quicken wisdom in those charged with ministries of discernment or mentorship;

and equip theological schools and faith communities in which vocations are encouraged and incubated, so your Church, devoting itself to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, the breaking of bread and the prayers, may live as a faithful sign and instrument of your Reign, drawing the world to the One who is Lamb, Gate, and Shepherd, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, now and for ever. Amen.

Open to the Spirit

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Often, as we try to be conscientious in following Jesus, we discover areas of life where we have not been living as good disciples—maybe we don't always tell the truth, or maybe there are people at our school we are not very kind to. He probably gave some adult examples too: our business practices or our sexual morality, maybe religious hypocrisy, or buried resentments.

We discover, in a word, that the jar which is our life is bigger than we knew, and that we are no longer full. At this point, Andrew poured the contents of jar number one into the next size up. Sure enough: the water that filled the first jar didn't even come up to halfway in the second.

Andrew went on: as soon as we hand those other areas of

our lives over to Jesus to learn his way, the Spirit flows into those places and our lives are full again. He picked up the pitcher, and filled jar number two to the top—and a little bit more. The children giggled appreciatively.

And so on. To be honest, I forget how often the pitcher topped up a half empty jar. It hardly matters. You see the point.

I expect that all through my life God will draw attention to those areas of my life that are not given over to God. Frequently, God will invite me to set aside my own agenda and learn from the Spirit's program instead. And when I do that, the Spirit comes in, to cleanse, heal, guide, empower—and fill.

But, I hear you protest, if I

open myself to the Spirit of Jesus, what happens to me? Do I become some kind of zombie without a personality of my own? It's natural to think that way, but fortunately it doesn't work like that. After all, the Spirit of Jesus is the Spirit of the God who made us and who loves us. And as we follow that Spirit, far from losing ourselves, we find that we become more the selves that God knows we can become—fuller, more alive, more ourselves than we would ever have been if left to our own devices.

That's the meaning of Pentecost, and that's why we need it.



Image: ballmasonjars.com

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The Prayer of Unveiling

JIM NEWMAN

Every Friday morning, a small, diverse, and geographically scattered group meets via ZOOM for 20 minutes of silent meditation and 40 minutes of sharing about a theological issue.

Recently I began my turn with a short story which had been attached anonymously to an internet article written by Fr. Richard Rohr, a well known American Franciscan priest and writer on spirituality. The article was called "The Prayer of Unveiling". It's from Fr. Rohr's book called *Everything Belongs: The Gift of Contemplative Prayer*.

"It was a hot summer day in New York City. As I stood clinging to a pole in the midst of a packed, noisy subway car, I longed to be anywhere else. But as I looked around, I became aware of the incredibly diverse array of humanity. No two were alike; each one was dressed differently, with different accents, hair styles, body types, skin colour, and faces. Yet each one was aglow with life. I realized that the whole subway car was full of the presence of God. If that's true of a subway, it's true of everything, everywhere. – Carrol F.J."

After a few moments I added the following revised version of that story, updated to a current time and place, and based on my own experience.

It was a very cold January

morning in Hamilton, Ontario. As I stood pouring hot coffee in Myler Hall at Christ's Church Cathedral as a volunteer with the Cathedral Café program, I knew I was where I should be. I looked around and became aware of the incredibly similar array of humanity. They were people seeking shelter from the cold and wet, from tent encampments, from cars used as shelters, from park benches, and from sleeping rough. Rather than a glow of life—I saw desperation, injuries, brokenness, exhaustion, malnourishment, and the effects of drug use. But I also realized that along with an incredible group of staff, volunteers, social workers, and security, that Myler Hall was full of the presence of God. And if that's true of Myler Hall, it's true of everything, everywhere.

From the volunteers, staff, social workers, and security personnel I saw kindness, respect, compassion, and hope, expressed as:

- *Good morning, would you like coffee or hot chocolate?*
- *How are you doing today?*
- *Would you like some hot oatmeal, sir? Yes, that would be wonderful, thank you.*
- *Yes, we have coats, hats and gloves. Do you like this one?*

And I saw and heard much respect returned:

- *Thank you very much, that was a good lunch.*

- *I'm just going out for a smoke, and I'm coming right back in. Thank you.*

In the overflowing space I saw conversations and friendships forming, people reading books, colouring with crayons, and working on puzzles. And as many departed for the day they called out to the volunteers and staff, "Thank you! Have a good afternoon!"

Cathedral Café. It's a partnership among the City of Hamilton, Christ's Church Cathedral, St. Matthew's House and Hamilton's Out of the Cold, and it's so much more than a warming and welcoming centre.

Is this what answered prayer from God looks like? I haven't even mentioned the positive impact all this has had on the lives of the volunteers, staff, social workers, and security personnel like Tammy. What about the positive effect on the rest of Christ's Church Cathedral, on St. Matthew's House, on Out of the Cold? What about the city managers? It may seem like answered prayer for them too.

You know, I've been known to complain that God is silent. I was expecting something different, like the construction of tiny homes, conversion of empty schools into adequate housing, and the elimination of street drugs and greedy landlords. I want support and adequate funding from all levels



Visitors to Cathedral Café can also access a clothing cupboard in the space.

Photo: Niagara Anglican file photo

of government. I'm impatient to see the implementation of a Basic Annual Income. But it seems those things will have to wait for now. Perhaps God is laying the foundation for more to come, perhaps more than we could ask or imagine.

Richard Rohr says: "We wait for God to do new things. We wait for who we are. We wait for the coming of grace, for the revelation of God. We wait for the truth. We wait for the vision of the whole. But we cannot just wait. We must pray. We say that prayer is not primarily words.

Yet prayer can be words, and if the words come out of that empty contemplative place, then we can trust that we really mean them."

The real question is, what does this have to say to us? What's the message or gift in this for us? How is God in this event? Where is God in this suffering? This is what Richard Rohr calls "a prayer of unveiling, asking that the cruciform shape of reality be revealed to us within the very shape and circumstances of our own lives."

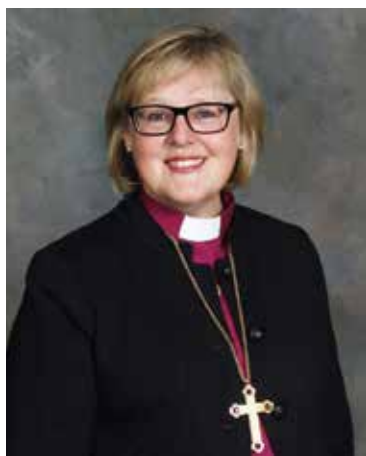
Bishop Plans Summer Sabbatical

After six years as diocesan bishop, Bishop Susan Bell has indicated to Synod Council that she will be taking a sabbatical leave from June 1 through August 31, 2024.

The diocese encourages all clergy and licensed lay workers to take periodic sabbatical leaves, drawing on the Genesis stories of creation and the Ten Commandments, exhorting the observance of Sabbath rest.

"I am grateful for the opportunity to pause and reflect on six happy and challenging years of episcopal ministry in our beloved diocese and will, as ever, keep you all in my prayers," wrote the bishop in a letter to the clergy and lay leaders of the diocese.

The bishop said she'll be using her time "to research and write, as well as making time for spiritual retreat." Bishop Bell's plans include academic study at the British Library in London and



an Ignatian Retreat at St. Bueno's Jesuit Spirituality Centre in North Wales, along with rest and refreshment while visiting family and friends.

In granting such leaves, the diocese seeks to bring renewed energy and enhanced knowledge and skill to the practice of ministry to benefit both the person taking a sabbatical and the Church. Leaves may be taken once every seven years of active ministry.

During the sabbatical, Archbishop Colin Johnson, assistant bishop, will be the bishop's commissary, provisioning episcopal ministry throughout the diocese, and exercising full authority as diocesan bishop, as necessary. He will be ably supported by Archdeacon Bill Mous, executive officer and secretary of synod, and Jane Wyse, the bishop's executive assistant.

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Climate Justice Niagara

The Environmental Journal of an Intern

RAUL GUERRERO

Growing up in Latin America, I took the thriving nature of the tropical latitudes for granted. Here, seasonal fruits are pretty much available year-round; and enjoying nature without considering its proper stewardship becomes the social norm, endangering what we have inherited for upcoming generations.

As I reflect on my arrival to Canada approximately eight months ago, I am filled with a sense of admiration and gratitude for the enriching experiences granted to me by our Heavenly Father. My journey began with a profound sense of excitement and overwhelming joy, after receiving an acceptance letter from Niagara College, stating my successful enrolment in the environmental management and assessment program.

At that time, I was unaware that this program would pave the road not only to broaden and enhance my understanding of environmental stewardship but also place me within an



Raul Guerrero with Sue Carson, a volunteer with Climate Justice Niagara, at Christ Church Flamborough, using the infrared temperature gauge as part of an energy audit at the parish.

Photo: Contributed by Climate Justice Niagara

internship where I could be directly involved in supporting climate efforts with a Christian approach. Previous positions in my career have offered me this type of opportunity, which is quite rare in the modern world, and I do not take it lightly as I see it linked with the Great Commission (Mathew 28: 16 - 20).

The year began with renewed energy and high expectations as my internship with Climate Justice Niagara (CJN) was set to start in mid-January. Despite unforeseen delays for the first couple of weeks, I had frequent communication with my supervisor, Deirdre Pike, where we tried to anticipate potential challenges and opportunities for the Communion Forest project and its effective implementation.

As the weeks progressed, I became more familiar with the project's primary goals, which helped me brainstorm numerous ways to simplify its implementation. A significant milestone was reached when I was tasked with creating a survey capable of effectively gathering meaningful data from the parishes within the Niagara region.

I must admit that this process took longer than expected, but the result made it worthwhile. The blend of general and technical questions in the survey was presented in a simple yet substantial manner, ultimately making a difference in achieving the targeted number of respondents established since the planning phase.

Additionally, I had the opportunity to participate in an energy audit assessment and analysis led by Sue Carson, with our initial interaction occurring at Christ Church, Flamborough. Despite my familiarity with topographical surveys from

back home, the human interaction during this process was unexpected and truly unique, which can only be explained through a spiritual lens.

One of the most rewarding experiences during this internship was the opportunity to introduce young people to the purpose of the Communion Forest at this year's Youth Leadership Training Program (YLTP) held at Camp Canterbury Hills, Ancaster. Meeting young individuals dedicated to their spiritual growth and environmental stewardship has given me something invaluable – hope. Hope that a healthier environment and better world can still be achieved according to the will and purpose of God.

Parting ways has never been easy for me. Whether it was leaving my parent's home or concluding a humanitarian mission in the Middle East, the farewell has always evoked the same moving emotions. It feels like the first time every time – a wave of sadness overcomes me as I stand before those who have accompanied me through incredible and unforgettable experiences. This departure is no exception. Therefore, I extend my heartfelt gratitude to every individual within the Anglican community who has made my work in environmental stewardship so deeply rewarding.



Blessings Abound!

Church of the Epiphany, Oakville ran an outreach campaign to put together Blessing Bags for the under housed in their community and beyond. With generous donations of money and items, Linda Shakespeare was able to put together eighty bags at a cost of about twenty dollars each. The bags contained a hat, socks, gloves, hygiene items, snack, Tim Hortons gift card and a prayer. Pam Spicer contributed sleeping bags and blankets. Parishioners were encouraged to keep a couple of the bags in their cars and hand them out as needed. Leftover bags were donated to the Cathedral Café ministry in Hamilton.

Photos: Contributed by Church of the Epiphany





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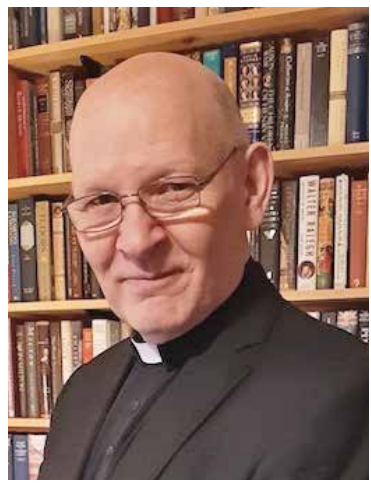
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Mental Health Too Important to be Sensationalized



THE REVEREND MICHAEL COREN

Earlier this year a Canadian journalist posted on what was Twitter and is now called X that people shouldn't be allowed Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors (SSRIs) until they've tried going to the gym twice a week. The post received more than a million views.

It's a quite extraordinarily irresponsible and cruel thing to say. While SSRIs may well be over-subscribed, and shouldn't be used unless acutely necessary, they have transformed the lives of people dealing with depression, anxiety, and stress. As Christians, we're called to compassion and empathy but also, contrary to what some atheists and cynics might argue,

to the scientific tradition that improves the human condition. I believe that the Church has been the handmaiden of science, and anybody who has worked with people dealing with mental illness knows full well how they cry out for support and relief.

Around 10% of North Americans use SSRIs and that number once included me. Twenty years ago, I'd never faced any major health issues and considered myself indestructible. Suddenly something different happened. I began to feel constant nausea. Not for a few hours, but almost all the time. I tried every remedy that was suggested but nothing seemed to help. Then I felt occasional sensations down my arms. Not pain but something I can best describe as a ripple. After this came a tightening of the throat. I had dizzy spells and couldn't eat or sleep.

One night it all was so bad that I went to the local emergency department. They assumed a heart attack, but it seemed ridiculous that a fit young man with no family history of early heart disease would be having a coronary. The doctors were excellent, examined me with machines I'd not seen before, took lots of blood,



Photo: Unsplash/Alexander Gray

and reassured that all was okay. But it wasn't.

I increased my life insurance, certain that I was dying. I'd been in the gym several days a week but had to stop because the nausea and dizziness got worse when I worked out. I'd never felt anything like it before. I had further tests on my stomach, an MRI, and a scan. Nothing. It was all I could do to go to work and function. I was existing rather than living.

Eventually, our GP, a man of great wisdom who knows me well, said, "Do you think it could be stress?" I was insulted. That's for middle-class moaners. I'm a working-class hero, we don't get stress, the Second World War, soccer violence, work for a living, are you kidding, and similar nonsense.

felt normal. Not high, not euphoric, just ordinary. It was, forgive the hyperbole, miraculous. The sensations had gone and have never returned.

I came off the drug a year later and did it very gradually. It wasn't easy but I managed. In all honesty I've no idea what would have happened if an experienced and caring doctor hadn't come to my rescue with a medication that, while not perfect and not for everybody, repaired me, and even saved me.

It's so easy to make crass generalizations and to shame people but it's so reckless and uncaring. We aren't fools, we understand the need for diet and exercise, but mental health is far too important to be left to soundbites and sensationalism. There are some Christians who argue that if one has a genuine belief in God, depression, anxiety, or stress are simply impossible. That's achingly reductive and foolish and a direct misunderstanding of what faith is and isn't; not some panacea or device but a constant conversation based in love rather than reward. They really should know better, as should anybody who comments on such a painful and dangerous situation.

My wife was in the waiting room. The doctor called her in to speak privately. He then asked me to join them. "You're doing three or four jobs, often getting just a few hours of sleep a night, sometimes hosting a morning radio show after an evening television gig, writing constantly, travelling all over Canada to give talks, returning on the red-eye so as to work first thing in the morning, and keeping an entire family together on your own efforts. Your mum and dad died, and you had to sell some of your possessions to be able to afford to take the time off and pay for flights, and you never have a day off. And you think stress can't get to you!"

Even then I was reluctant to agree. He prescribed an SSRI and within two days I simply

For Lent Give, Not Give Up



Instead of giving something up for Lent the members of St. Andrew's Anglican Church in Grimsby decided to Give. They filled bags of useful items to donate to Grimsby Benevolent Fund (GBF), Foundation of Resources for Teens (FORT), Gillian's Place and the diocese's Migrant Farm Workers project. Pictured are: Bishop Michael Oulton (interim), Gillian Wood, Pat Barker, Margaret Phoenix and Gail Hains- Campbell.

Photo: R. Emmerson

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Sister Space Ministry

**THE REVEREND
DEACON JOYCE
RICHARDSON-TUFFORD**

The Sister Space Ministry began in September, 2021. It is a support group for women to help them deal with the challenges, losses, and traumas in their lives. Members form a network of support for their sisters as they navigate the ups and downs of everyday life.

This community of women encourages each other when feeling overwhelmed. It is a time to share large and small events in their lives and to share individual happenings with gratitude.

Sister Space has grown from 8 to 15 members, ranging in age from the mid-fifties to the late eighties. This is an outreach ministry; 12 of the women are not affiliated with a church.

The guidelines of the Sister Space Ministry are:

1. an emotionally safe place shall be provided
2. conversations among members during meet-

- ings are confidential
3. all feelings are acceptable - there will be no judgement
4. all physical, emotional, spiritual and intellectual boundaries shall be respected
5. a safe place for all religious and spiritual beliefs shall be provided
6. the group shall celebrate and encourage members' success'
7. group members reach out to each other to inquire "How are you doing?" between meetings.

Members of Sister Space meet for lunch to share love even during the toughest times. Each gathering begins with this prayer:

There are many friends who brighten up our days. Our Sister Space friends have special ways letting us know that they are there.

Just calling to say hello and show they care,

our friends are gifts from God, beside as we go.

Each Sister shares her ups and downs and is encouraged to find joy, even in the toughest times. It is being part of a community of women who encourage each other. It is each sister's decision to share what they are comfortable sharing.

Many of the women face very difficult problems: cancer, surgery, loss of a parent or child. It is a place to share grief and feel the love and support of fellow sisters.

As the group progressed, sisters were more comfortable sharing their situations and updates were more detailed. These women feel heard; with their sisters providing tips and knowledge, Sister Space becomes very helpful, beyond empathy.

Other members are caregivers and need a break from their reality. As they share, members of the group help them recharge. Other women need the society of their sisters as



they are isolated and have few family members close by. The sisters, like siblings, provide support for the hard decisions that need to be made.

This is exactly the purpose of Sister Space. Women can use a "big sister" to listen and help with their best interests in mind. Every Sister Space gathering ends with a prayer:

Friendship is the golden thread that ties the hearts of all.

Go forward in love until we meet again.

Here are some shared thoughts from Sister Space gatherings:

- ▶ Rather than focus on unmet targets, praise the sisters for every attempt made, regardless of the outcome. "Practice compassion toward yourself and allow your honest feelings. Be brave enough to heal yourself even when it hurts. Most of your strength lies in your scars." Bianca Sparacino

- ▶ "Remember that whatever kind of day you are having, life is an ocean whose waves are alive. When you find yourself on top, savour this; when you are in mid-storm, know that it too will pass." Sky Banyes, "The Little Book of Silver Linings"

- ▶ "Somedays there won't be a song in your heart. Sing anyway." Emory Austin

- ▶ "Grief and loss will always be constant companions in life. Love lives forever; grief is the price we pay for love." Queen Elizabeth II

- ▶ "Find the little things for which we are grateful, every day of the week." Sky Banyes, "The Little Book of Silver Linings"

- ▶ Today is life—the only life you are sure of. Make the most of today." Dale Carnegie

Joyce serves as the deacon at St. John's Anglican Church, Jordan.

Reaching out in the name of God

BEV GROOMBRIDGE

Circle of Friends is an outreach initiative of The Church of Our Saviour The Redeemer, in Stoney Creek.

It is a monthly gathering of women from our parish and beyond. The event consists of a gathering of an ever-growing group of friends. The first part of the morning is spent just catching up with each other and enjoying each other's company over tea and coffee. There is much chatter and laughter filling the air.

A variant of hot and nutritious complimentary lunches are served complete with dessert on the first Wednesday

of the month. Our thanks to Connie Hamilton for lunch preparation and to all those helping on the day.

Following lunch, the group enjoys craft making and often this is followed by a game. Tea and coffee are made available throughout the event.

There were 30 women in attendance at our March meeting and we are so blessed because almost 2/3rds of those in attendance were from the wider community. We are so happy that these lovely ladies are given the opportunity to know us and realize that we are a welcoming and friendly community of Christians.

Many people are living on



Photos: Contributed by Bev Groombridge

their own and this event meets the needs of those who spend many hours with no one to interact with throughout the

week. Strangers are becoming friends.

There is no charge for this event, although a freewill offer-

ing plate is made available.

If you are interested in attending, please RSVP by calling the church.

Niagara Anglican Deadlines and Submission Guidelines

Upcoming Deadlines:

- September – July 26
- October – August 30
- November – September 27

Submissions:

- News, Letters, Reviews**
(books, films, music, theatre)
– 400 words or less
- Articles** – 600 words or less

Original cartoons or art –

- Contact the Editor.
- Photos** – very large, high resolution (300 ppi), action pictures (people doing something). Include name of photographer. Written permission of parent/guardian must be obtained if photo includes a child.

All submissions must include writer's full name and contact information. We reserve the right to edit or refuse submissions.

Questions or information:

Contact the Editor at editor@niagaraanglican.ca

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No one left behind: equality, freedom and justice for all

DEIRDRE PIKE

That's the theme for this year's International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia, and Biphobia, observed May 17.

"No one left behind: equality, freedom and justice for all," focusses on global unity for the day with the goal of raising awareness regarding the discrimination, violence, and challenges experienced by the LGBTQIA+ community.

After worldwide consultations with LGBTQI+ people around the world, the 2024 IDAHOTB theme was chosen in connection



to the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

"Only through solidarity for each other will we create a world without injustice, where no one is left behind." This organizational statement on the

IDAHOTB website, is a reminder of the deep divisions that have developed in many parts of the globe when it comes to LGBTQI+ human rights.

One way of marking May 17 is to celebrate a liturgy focused on the theme of Queer and Trans awareness, or praying this prayer shared by the Proud Anglicans of Huron group.

The Diocese of Niagara will be holding its annual pride service, *Fiercely Loved*, in support of 2SLGBTQI+ inclusion on the 2nd Sunday of June this year.

WE GIVE THANKS FOR THE SACREDNESS OF HUMANITY. WE AFFIRM OUR CALL TO WITNESS AND RESPOND TO HUMAN SUFFERING AND BROKENNESS.

WHERE LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL, TRANSGENDER, AND QUEER PEOPLE ARE PERSECUTED OR DISCRIMINATED AGAINST, WE MUST NOT KEEP SILENT. WE LAMENT THE INJUSTICES FACED BY LGBTQ PEOPLE IN OUR COMMUNITIES AND ACROSS THE GLOBE.

ROOTED IN AWARENESS, WE PRAY FOR HEALING. ANCHORED IN HUMILITY, WE WORK FOR PEACE AND JUSTICE.

GUIDED BY LOVE, WE HOPE FOR A WORLD WHERE ALL PEOPLE ARE CELEBRATED AND LOVED, WHERE THEIR RIGHTS ARE SECURED, AND WHERE THEIR SEXUAL AND GENDER DIVERSITY IS VALUED.

AMEN.

Fire-Flowers

THE REVEREND CANON DR. SHARYN HALL

AND ONLY WHERE THE FOREST FIRES HAVE SPED,
SCORCHING RELENTLESSLY THE COOL NORTH LANDS,
A SWEET WILD FLOWER LIFTS ITS PURPLE HEAD,
AND, LIKE SOME GENTLE SPIRIT SORROW-FED,
IT HIDES THE SCARS WITH ALMOST HUMAN HANDS.

This poem was written a hundred years ago by E. Pauline Johnson, whose First Nations name was Tekahionwake. She was born in 1861 on the Six Nations Reserve in Canada West (Ontario), the daughter of an English woman and a Mohawk chief. She became a popular poet, touring the Canadas, United Kingdom and United States giving poetry readings. Her best-known collection of verse is *Flint and Feather* (1912). She died in 1913.



E. Pauline Johnson, or Tekahionwake.

Photo: poets.org



Photo: Unsplash/K8

Forest fires have been a common event of Canadian history, but what we are experiencing now is warning us that we may be reaching a new reality. Record-breaking years of fires are becoming more common as the climate heats up. In 2023, over 170,000 square kilometres of forest burned in Canada, including British Columbia, the Northwest Territories, Ontario, Quebec, and Nova Scotia. The flames are fed by mighty swaths of boreal forest, which have burned and regenerated cyclically for millennia, but now the regenerating process is shortened by the frequency of more fires.

The destruction of acres of trees is a catastrophe for wildlife, vegetation and the ecosystem. Trees are now called

the lungs of the earth, breathing in the atmosphere and helping to protect the ozone layer above us. We celebrate the beauty of trees and forests, but when they are ravaged by fire, a scar upon the earth remains. Often the homes of people are damaged or destroyed, taking lives, livelihoods and memories.

We cannot deny that the Earth is becoming increasingly battered by destructive forces in nature, including fires, floods and windstorms, but not everyone wants to take steps to protect the environment. They argue that preventative measures may harm economic progress. For generations, the natural world has been viewed as an inexhaustible resource for

human sustenance, comfort, and profit.

In recent years, we have learned that these comforts and profits have come at a cost to the world around us. Discoveries in medical sciences have revealed that many diseases and ailments are directly related to pollution of air, water, soil, plant life and many species of animal and marine life. The rise of scientific discoveries has helped us understand the world in which we live, and this knowledge has opened our eyes and been used to teach us about environmental protection.

This past March, fire fighters and first responders were gathering for training in the best ways to overcome the

destructive powers of fire in anticipation of another record season of wild fires. The ability of the natural world to regenerate itself, as Pauline Johnson describes in her poem, gives us hope, but we are learning that the regenerative process may be reaching limits. The appearance of 'fire-flowers' in the blackened earth are signs of new life, but will that continue to happen. The Bible tells us there will be "new heavens and a new earth" (Rev.21:1). The prophet Isaiah gives us a wonderful picture of the renewed earth: "Instead of the thorn bush will grow the pine tree, and instead of the briars the myrtle will grow." (Isaiah 11:9).

Those of us who cherish God's

world can keep the concept of environmental protection foremost in our minds and hearts. There are many ways, large and small, in which we can support the care of the earth in our neighbourhoods, our communities and our country.

*And only to the heart that knows of grief,
Of desolating fire, of human pain,
There comes some purifying sweet belief,
Some fellow-feeling, beautiful, if brief,
And life revives and blossoms once again.*