

**A Post-Secular Canada**  
Explore the challenges and opportunities

Page **2**



**Vestry Season**  
Are you ready?

Page **9**



**Applicants Sought for Youth Leadership Training Program**

Page **10**



A section of the Anglican Journal



# NIAGARA ANGLICAN



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FEBRUARY 2025

## Bishop Susan's Lenten Book Choice

Join Bishop Susan Bell this Lent to explore Jesus' call to share our faith.

This year's Bishop's Book for Lent is Judith Paulsen's *A New and Ancient Evangelism: Rediscovering the Ways God Calls and Sends*. Each chapter of this book explores a different conversion story from scripture, with Paulsen guiding readers to explore how the lessons can be applied to evangelism today. At once deeply theological and profoundly practical, this book invites us to recognize conversion as the transformative work of God, in which we, as ordinary people, are called to actively participate.

Paulsen is an Anglican priest

who served 15 years in parish ministry. Following this she began a career as a professor at Wycliffe College and directed the Wycliffe Institute of Evangelism. Paulsen now serves as the Coordinator of the Season of Spiritual Renewal in the Diocese of Toronto.

One of the reasons Bishop Susan Bell chose *A New and Ancient Evangelism* for the 2025 Lenten book study is because it aligns well with our diocesan mission action plan (MAP). As Bishop Susan explains:

"One of our diocesan MAP priorities is to keep our eyes firmly fixed on Jesus. This book offers us inspiration for how we can do one of the things Jesus

asked us to do—share our faith with others. In a time when many Anglicans are hesitant about evangelism, Judith Paulsen's authentic, respectful, and thoughtful approach to the topic redefines how we are meant to share the good news. Her work is deeply rooted in scripture, yet accessible and encouraging for all people. She focuses on how God works through ordinary people, giving us the confidence to share our faith with others."

Parishes are encouraged to make plans for group studies of this book during Lent. The discussion questions at the end of each chapter in the book are designed to inspire deep, mean-



ingful conversations and spark fresh action in sharing our faith.

*A New and Ancient Evangelism* is available for purchase through the diocesan offices for \$20 per book. If you have questions about the study

or would like to purchase books, please contact Emily Hill, parish development missionary, at [emily.hill@niagaraanglican.ca](mailto:emily.hill@niagaraanglican.ca).

## Human Trafficking? Yes, in our own backyards!

DEIRDRE PIKE

The first time a workshop participant questioned the facts I had presented on human trafficking in Niagara using data from The Canadian Centre to End Human Trafficking, I was flabbergasted and didn't know how to respond. The second time I was better prepared but decided another approach was needed. I wasn't making this stuff up!

It is true that Indigenous girls as young as eight are victims of trafficking.

It is true that the majority (67%) of human trafficking in Canada happens in Ontario.

It is true that Niagara is wrapped around the major



Photo: Unsplash/Milada Vigaró

artery for human trafficking, the 401.

And, casinos and strip clubs don't help.

So, Human Trafficking Justice Niagara (HTJN), a steering committee comprised of lay and clergy folk, decided it was time to invite an expert panel to

help dispel the myths. While the group has hosted three virtual educational events since its inception in 2020, this one would be in-person.

On October 26, three experts provided a most informative session, "Human Trafficking – Not in My Backyard," for just over 50

participants at Christ's Church Cathedral. After a welcome and land acknowledgement by the new chair of HTJN, Wendy Saunders (St. James and St. Brendan, Port Colborne), Tim Dobbin, Rector of the Cathedral, extended a welcome and thanked the committee mem-

bers for their work throughout the year.

The three guest speakers were Detective Kyle Jarvis of the Hamilton Police Service, Jen Lucking, executive direc-

See **HUMAN TRAFFICKING** Page 9

# The Reality of Post-Secular Canada: Challenges and Opportunities for Anglican Parishes and Missions

THE REVEREND CANON DR. IAN MOBSBY

Canada is often characterized as a highly secular nation, where organized religion appears to have lost much of its cultural significance. However, this narrative is now profoundly changing. Recent trends point to the emergence of what many scholars term a post-secular society—a complex cultural mix in which secularism, religious pluralism, and a resurgence of spiritual searching co-exist. This new reality has significant implications for the diocese and Anglican parish churches and their mission, particularly in their engagement with diverse social groupings such as spiritual seekers and those who identify as “spiritual but not religious” (SBNR). For us as Anglican Christians, understanding and responding to these shifts is both a challenge and an opportunity to reimagine mission in a way that is faithful to our Anglican traditions while being relevant and accessible to contemporary Canadian society.

## Understanding the Post-Secular Landscape in Canada

The concept of post-secularism highlights the ways in which religion and spirituality continue to shape public and private life, even in societies that were thought to be increasingly secular. In Canada, declining church attendance and the rise of religious “nones” (those who claim no religious affiliation) suggest a retreat from institutional religion. Yet, these trends coexist with a growing interest in spirituality, mindfulness practices, meditation, spiritual dialogue, and explorations of meaning beyond materialism.

Immigration has also contributed to a religiously diverse society, where Christianity shares the stage with Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Sikhism, and other traditions. Additionally, Indigenous spiritualities are receiving renewed attention as part of the broader work of reconciliation. Meanwhile, many Canadians, including those who reject traditional religious labels, are engaging in personal spiritual practices, from yoga to meditation, while exploring existential questions of purpose,

identity, and connection.

This fragmented spiritual landscape points to a key dynamic of post-secularism: the disconnection of spirituality from traditional religious institutions. For many unchurched spiritual seekers, Christianity is seen as a religion and not a spirituality, and many consider that Church does not have the resources or focus to assist spiritual seekers in their pilgrimage for significance. Rather than going to Sunday worship services, spiritual seekers explore individualized, eclectic forms of spiritual expression. This does not mean that religion is irrelevant; rather, it is being reconfigured in ways that challenge the established patterns of Christian ministry and mission.

## The Emergence of New Social Groupings

In the post-secular context, social groupings are often defined less by shared religious affiliations and more by common questions or pursuits. Two key groups stand out in this landscape: spiritual seekers and the SBNR.

**Spiritual Seekers:** This group is characterized by a deep hunger for meaning, connection, and transcendence. They may explore a variety of spiritual paths, drawing from multiple traditions or none at all. Spiritual seekers often value experiential practices, such as meditation, dialogue groups, retreats, or pilgrimages, over doctrinal certainty. They are drawn to communities or

practices that offer authenticity, inclusivity, and a sense of belonging.

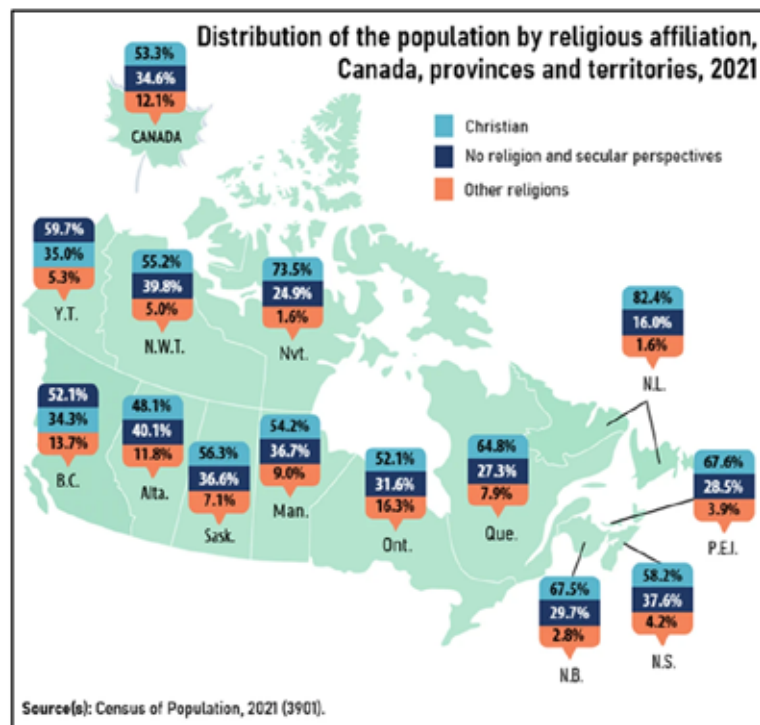
**Spiritual but Not Religious (SBNR):** The SBNR population represents a growing demographic in Canada. They distance themselves from institutional religion, often citing perceptions of dogmatism, hypocrisy, or irrelevance. However, they do not reject spirituality itself; rather, they seek to cultivate personal, often unstructured, relationships with the divine or the sacred. For the SBNR, spirituality is a journey rather than a destination, marked by fluidity and an openness to new experiences.

Both groups challenge traditional models of church engagement, which often assume regular attendance, doctrinal adherence, and accessibility of Sunday Worship services. Instead, they invite a rethinking of how the church might meet people where they are, offering spaces for exploration, dialogue, spirituality and authentic community.

## Implications for Anglican Parish Churches

In this context, Anglican parish churches face a critical question: How can they remain faithful to their identity while responding creatively to the realities of post-secular Canada? The answer lies in embracing a mission that is both rooted in tradition and open to innovation and missional engagement.

### 1. Reimagining the Parish Church as a “spiritual hub”



art exhibits, or mindfulness workshops that appeal to those on the margins of institutional religion.

### 2. Focusing on Spiritual Practices over Doctrinal Certainty

Anglicanism has a rich tradition of spiritual practices, from contemplative prayer to compline. Offering these practices as accessible tools for spiritual exploration can resonate with seekers who are less interested in doctrinal debates but deeply drawn to experiences of the sacred.

### 3. Emphasising Hospitality and Radical Welcome

The biblical call to hospitality is especially relevant in the post-secular age. Anglican parishes can embody a radical welcome, creating spaces where people of all backgrounds and beliefs feel safe to ask questions, share doubts, and explore faith at their own pace. This requires a shift from seeing hospitality as mere friendliness to embracing it as a spiritual discipline that reflects the unconditional love of God.

Continued Page 3



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# The Reality of Post-Secular Canada

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

## 4. Giving Room for Intimate Small Events aimed at Spiritual Seekers

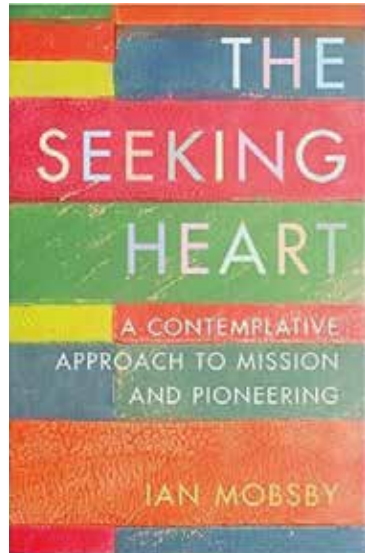
As is currently being promoted as the 'Hamilton Well' at our Cathedral every Thursday, there is an event called 'Meditation and Beer' which gives room for spiritual seekers to engage in a Christian form of meditation and community. Anglican churches can engage meaningfully in such events focusing on spirituality rather than religion, offering content that is both spiritually enriching and accessible. These can be promoted digitally in spaces where spiritual seekers are present such as the 'Meetup' social media application.

## 5. Drawing on the Contemplative

The Anglican Church is founded on the mystical and contemplative prayer resources and theology of monasticism. This is the origin and root of our liturgical and prayer traditions. Further, our Anglican theology draws on contemplative and mystical theology. In short, we all need to become far deeper Christians who practise deep contemplation which is sadly neglected in many places. If we are seeking to open up Christian spirituality to post-secular spiritual seekers, then this begins with us all becoming far deeper contemplatives. This will enable our parish churches to develop contemplative prayer groups and missional events such as meditation aimed at unchurched spiritual seekers.

## 6. Adopting a Missional Mindset

Finally, as Bishop Susan has been promoting for some time, Anglican parishes need to embrace a missional approach to ministry, under-



standing themselves not as static organizations but as dynamic community organisms sent into the world. This means prioritizing relationships over programs, focusing on listening to the needs and stories of the local community, and being willing to adapt traditional forms of ministry to meet contemporary realities. This may include activities aimed at enabling spiritual seekers to explore Christian spirituality through missional events such as a spiritual dialogue group and a regular missional meditation group.

I have recently written a book aimed at helping Anglican Christians and beyond to understand and explore a ministry with unchurched spiritual seekers published under the title of *The Seeking Heart* with SCM Press and offer this as a resource for missional engagement.

## 7. Parish as Mixed Ecology Church

It is very difficult to use traditional Sunday morning services to meet the spiritual needs of all those who live in the neighbourhoods of parish churches. There has always been the tradition of having more than one service on a Sunday to relate to the needs of varying people hence why some churches have an early

morning or BCP Service followed by a later family Holy Communion or Eucharist Service. Mixed Ecology stretches this tradition further in that it invites new missional initiatives to form relevant and accessible forms of ecclesial communities and eventual congregations for those who become Christians from being spiritual seekers fully integrated into the parish church. In this way, the parish church becomes a hub for different congregations made up of different people groups, and needs in the parish neighbourhood. In this situation, there may be a missional community as part of a parish where there are events and services that happen alongside traditional ministry and worship services. Such initiatives will begin in some form of contextual mission, with the hope that this contextual mission in time will evolve into an ecclesial community as part of a parish or mission. Here are some ideas for possible starting activities:

### 1. Setting up a Church contemplative prayer group as a first step.

It's true to say that you can't draw on Christian spirituality to reach post-secular spiritual seekers if you have not developed a contemplative prayer group. So, the first step in a parish or mission could be to set up a contemplative prayer group to then be able to use this as a medium for mission later.

### 2. Using event-driven social media applications to engage with spiritual seekers.

Applications such as Meetup, Eventbrite, and others are good ways of

making connections with post-secular spiritual seekers to spirituality focused events BUT NOT to try and invite de-and-unchurched people to attend an ordinary traditional worship service.

### 3. Setting up a silent meditation group in person in a library or other community space aimed at spiritual seekers.

This will need to be careful about Church and Christian language and jargon. I am going to run some short evening courses on how to do this well. Once you get into it, it is really not that complicated and very rewarding.

### 4. Setting up a spirituality dialogue group in person again in a community facility or room in a bar or pub for example.

This is slightly harder than the meditation group and needs careful facilitation to keep the conversation on topic and to be a learning environment. Again, I am going to be running some one-off evening sessions on experiencing this and how to consider setting something like this up.

### 5. Book reading groups in a neutral venue.

An exciting possibility is to

Continued Page 5



Photo: Unsplash/Jessica Da Rosa

## NIAGARA ANGLICAN

The official publication of the Diocese of Niagara, published 10 times a year from September to June as a supplement to the *Anglican Journal*.

The Diocese of Niagara lies at the western end of Lake Ontario, encompassing the Niagara Peninsula, Hamilton, Halton Region, Guelph and portions of Wellington and Dufferin Counties.

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Proofreader: Wendy Leigh Bell

Art Director/Layout: Craig Fairley  
Imagine Creative Communications  
Printed and mailed by:  
Webnews Printing Inc., North York, ON  
Available online at:  
[niagaraanglican.news](http://niagaraanglican.news) (blog)  
[niagaraanglican.ca/newspaper](http://niagaraanglican.ca/newspaper) (PDF)  
Subscriptions: \$15/year.  
Submissions:  
Submission information and deadlines are printed elsewhere in the paper.

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**In other words**

# What can Anglicans learn from other denominations?

**JOHN BOWEN**

Have you heard of the Canterbury Trail? It's a witty way of referring to the fact that lots of people, particularly young people, from other denominations are attracted to Anglicanism. Our own church has young people who were formerly Reformed, Baptist, Lutheran, Wesleyan, and Presbyterian—and that's just off the top of my head. Not that this is a new phenomenon: the first use of the phrase was a book by Robert Webber entitled *Evangelicals on the Canterbury Trail* way back in 1985!

But this is a two-way street. We can become complacent about the fact that Anglicanism is sometimes attractive to people in other traditions. The opposite is also true: we have important things to learn from other denominations. If we dismiss them offhand as “conservative,” “non-sacramental,” or “non-liturgical,” we will be missing out. Let me give you three recent examples that made me think.

**Divine Renovation**

In October, I was in Calgary for an interdenominational conference on church planting. Around 250 people were present, from a range of mainly evangelical denominations. That in itself might teach us some things, but perhaps the most remarkable thing about the conference was that one of the plenary speakers was a Roman Catholic lay person. In fact, as he began to speak, he said, “I find it hard to believe I've been invited to speak to a conference of evangelicals!”

Why was he there? He is part of a renewal movement within the Roman Catholic Church called Divine Renovation ([divinerenovation.org](http://divinerenovation.org)). Their website opens with words that could have been written by an Anglican: “Your parish was made for mission. After all, Jesus didn't



Photo: Unsplash/Priscilla Du Preez

give the Church a mission: he gave his mission a Church. The trouble is (and this is hard to hear), most parishes are living through an identity crisis: they've forgotten their purpose.” Hmm, where have I heard that kind of thing before?

There is a lot of interesting material on their website, including encouraging stories of congregations discovering new life and beginning to grow again. If I had to reduce their strategy to its simplest level, I would say they are doing two things: they have learned to welcome people, and they offer the Alpha course (which, we should note, is Anglican in origin!).

**Pentecostals**

I had coffee recently with a Pentecostal friend (yes, I do have some) who told me of Pentecostal congregations which are bucking the trend of declining numbers. He said, “I have a guaranteed three-point method of helping churches grow.” I was intrigued. “Tell me,” I said, quite prepared to be skeptical. His reply was simple: “Number one: invite people. Number two: don't suck. Number three: make friends.”

Of course, he is right. “Invite people”—but to what? Probably not just a regular Sunday, but what about a special service for Mother's Day (in May), or a Blessing of the Animals (in

September), or the Christmas carol service (OK, I admit it's a bit early—or late—to be thinking about that one)?

Then, “Don't suck.” In other words, whatever you do, do it with excellence, “as to the Lord.” And “make friends.” That's a huge topic in itself, but it puts us on our guard against just thinking, “Oh good, another giving unit!”

**Reformed**

Lots of our parishes collect food for St. Matthew's House, and that's a good thing, of course. But some neighbourhoods run their own food collection from time to time, quite separate from local churches.

One neighbourhood association I know of distributes big brown paper bags to every home in the area beforehand, and then volunteers drive round on the day itself to collect the full bags. One church, in the Reformed tradition, decided they wouldn't do their own independent food collection but would contribute what they could to the neighbourhood effort. They offered their premises to the volunteers as a food collection point and provided a warm welcome and refreshments for folks as they dropped off their bags of food.

The bags that were distributed had the names of the sponsoring groups printed on them—local lawyers' offices,

local grocery stores, and so on. Plus, the name of the Reformed church! And at the annual meeting of the neighborhood association, there was a shout-out to just one of the local churches, a thank you for their partnership and warm hospitality—and you know which one it was.

**The Body of Christ**

When we think about “the church” as the Body of Christ, we most often think of the varied members of our own congregation and their unique

contributions to the life and mission of the church. Nothing wrong with that, of course.

But what if we also thought of churches of different denominations as unique parts of the Body of Christ, each doing things the others cannot, and therefore all of them necessary? And what if we thought about how those different members can work together to serve the world?

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# Elections and Our Duty

**THE REVEREND DEACON  
RODERICK MCDOWELL**

2025 marks the 45th federal election year. At the time of writing this article, before December 31, 2024, political instability has Canadians looking for an earlier election than the scheduled fall date. In Ontario, provincial party leaders are also preparing for a possible 2025 election.

The word election is only mentioned three times in the Bible: twice in the Epistle to the Romans and once in 2nd Peter. All of them refer to the authors' calling on people to elect to follow Christ or encourage others to do so. There is no reference to elections in a democratic society.

Nevertheless, we are fortunate to live in a country where elections are free and transparent. Our neighbour to the south has tried to follow the same pattern. However, the results of citizen participation are not overwhelming.

In the 2024 presidential election in the U.S., despite all the publicity and the billions spent by candidates, about 65 per cent

of those eligible to vote did so. In our last federal election in 2021, only about 63 per cent voted, while in 2019 it reached 69 per cent. In our last Ontario election, only 43.5 per cent of eligible voters bothered to turn out.

I submit that these turnouts are abysmal. They mean that one in three citizens in both Canada and the U.S. simply failed to vote. These turnouts present a challenge to us as Christians and society as a whole.

Christ called us to worship

and love God. But Jesus also called us to love our neighbours as ourselves. In Matthew 25: 31-46, Jesus reminds us of our obligations to others. There are many other examples such as Luke 6:27-36 and the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10: 20-37).

These passages are symbolic of how Christ wants us to respond to the needs of our neighbors. I believe we need to be involved not only on a one-to-one basis but also to



advocate for society that cares. I am therefore suggesting we all need to stay informed and get involved in making our elected officials reflect in their policies and procedures the kind of just and caring society that Christ should have us make.

This means we all need to heed the cry of our Lord to be involved and care about our world, our country, and our society. We need to stay informed and challenge our politicians to build a society that cares for everyone.

Above all, we need to vote in each and every election. We need to encourage our friends, neighbors, and indeed everyone, to exercise their sacred right to mark our ballots on election day.

Let me tell you a true story about why it is important to vote. Several years ago, Ft. Erie had a very hotly contested mayoral

election. Shortly before the polls closed, the incumbent mayor's campaign office got a request to take 4 people to a polling station. A car was sent, and the people were able to vote. That night the results indicated that the mayor had won by 2 votes. A recount raised the total to 6.

There are many other examples of very close elections and the importance of each and every vote. For those of us who are citizens, we have been given the right and ability to vote. For those of us who are permanent residents, you still have the right to make your voice and opinions known.

Christ calls us to work for a society in which our duty to our neighbor is sacred. Let us heed that call.



# The Reality of Post-Secular Canada

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

use spiritually accessible books by authors coming from the Contemplative Christian traditions including the mystics and books about the mystics to explore their teaching in a missional context, with writers such as Thomas Merton, Teresa of Avila, St John of the Cross, Meister Eckert, Julian of Norwich, Brother Lawrence of Taizé, Abbot Jamieson Worth Abbey, etc. Again, good to do this in a neutral environment.

## 6. Death Cafes.

An interesting recent development has been the gatherings of non-religious people trying to make sense of their impermanence, as there is very little opportunity for many to engage with this which is fundamentally related to people's existential questions of life which are spiritual, see <https://deathcafe.com>.

## 7. Spirituality & mindfulness prayer walks and hikes.

Exploring spirituality isn't just about meditation—it's also about walking, pilgrimages, or the like. One great opportunity could be to organize a walk or hike where there can be spiritual stations as part of the walk where you can either pause and do something like contemplate nature or some other reflective activity.

## The Positive Opportunities of Post-Secular Mission

While the reality of post-secular Canada poses challenges, it also presents Anglican parishes with a remarkable opportunity to rediscover their spiritual and missional identity. By engaging authentically with spiritual seekers and the SBNR, Anglican parishes and missions can offer something unique: a vision of faith that is both rooted in tradition and alive to the questions of our time. This requires humility, creativity, and a willingness to let go of old assumptions about what church

should look like.

In the end, the post-secular context is not a threat to the Anglican Church's mission but an invitation to embrace its core calling: to proclaim the gospel in ways that speak to the deepest longings of the human heart. By stepping into this new reality with courage and grace, Anglican parishes can become places of hope, healing, and transformation for all who look to encounter the living God.



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# Winter Sowing: Start seeds outdoors through the Canadian winter

**NORMAN NEWBERY AND ERINN TURNBULL**

2025 will be the third year since the St. John the Evangelist Stormwater Management Rain Garden was installed. This is a native pollinator rain garden that was installed with the support of Green Venture in the spring of 2025. Rainwater is diverted away from the roof of the church into a tank, where it is stored to supply water for the garden.

The past two years we have provided opportunities for children and adults to learn about the garden and some of its unique features. One area that continues to surprise people is winter sowing. Winter sowing of seeds sounds counterintuitive. Don't we have to wait until the spring to plant our seeds?

Like much of the care of native gardens, the best results are achieved when we imitate nature and choose seeds that are already adapted to our climate—native seeds. The method below, written by Erinn Turnbull, is provided in detail so that you can try winter sowing for yourself.

**How did the garden come about?**

The Church had rainwater seeping through the building foundation into the basement. The solution was a stormwater management garden, installed with the support of Green Venture's sustainable green



The St. John the Evangelist Stormwater Management Rain Garden is filled with native species.

Photo: Contributed by Norman Newbery

infrastructure NATURhood program, their contractors, and an energetic team of volunteers from the church and community. The garden is planted with native and nativar species that benefit insects and our local wildlife. The garden is watered with rain captured from the roof, which is diverted into a large holding tank and is later pumped out to the garden via soaker hoses when needed. The garden is maintained by a volunteer team consisting of church and other community members – it is lower maintenance than a traditional garden of non-native plants. Enjoyed by the community for its beauty, it also educates about the benefits

of native plants and positive effects of biodiversity for our local wildlife.

**Winter-sowing: starting new native plants for the garden**

Winter-sowing is a low-maintenance and inexpensive method to start many types of seeds outdoors, in a protective manner to increase your success, while using the natural freeze/thaw cycle of the seasons. It works especially well for most native plants as many need cold stratification to break seed dormancy for germination.

Seeds are sown into potting mix into 'mini greenhouses' that are made from recycled plastic bottles/containers and

are placed outside in late fall to early winter. The seeds will sprout naturally just when the time is right and can be grown-on in the winter-sow containers until ready for transplanting or potting up. Once the weather is warm in spring, the winter sow containers should be 'opened' so your plants don't overheat and be watered as required. Winter-sown plants are hardened-off naturally/automatically outdoors, they can go right from the winter-sow container into your garden.

Save seeds from the garden as the pods mature during the season. Swap and share seeds with other gardeners for winter sowing to economically increase

your plant variety.

Tips: Choose a clear container of any colour that is tall enough to provide 4-6 inches of potting mix and 4-6 inches of 'greenhouse' space above soil level—2L or 4L water bottles work well, as do clear clamshell type containers. Don't forget to put drainage holes in the bottom of your container and to add a label for easy identification in the spring!

*Norman Newbery of the Church of St. John the Evangelist, Hamilton and Erinn Turnbull, Past-President of the Kirkendall Garden Club share the coordination and care of the rain garden.*

**Detailed Instructions**



**STEP 1 - PREP CONTAINER**

- gather together your supplies
- if possible, remove any labels from your container and remove the screw-off lid (if it has one) to provide ventilation
- if your container doesn't have a screw-off lid, carefully add a few holes to the top of your container
- carefully add drainage holes to the bottom of your container
- decide where the horizontal cut should be made, the soil will be filled to this level and should be about half-way (4-6 inches each above and below soil level depending on height of your container)
- carefully make the cut 3/4 the way around - the uncut side will create a 'hinge' for the top to bend back.

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**STEP 2 - ADD POTTING MIX & SEEDS**

- put your potting mix into a bowl or bucket and dampen it well with room temperature water - it shouldn't be dripping, but should hold together
- optional - you can place a few sheets of toilet paper over your drainage holes first to prevent soil coming out of the holes
- fill your container with potting mix
  - if your seed will be surface sown (when they need light to germinate), fill to the top of the cut line and gently even out the surface
  - if your seed will be covered, leave appropriate space from the cut line so you may add more soil
- sow your seeds - **less is more**, give them enough space to grow for the first few weeks - a good rule is a minimum of one square inch per seed for small to medium seeds so they have enough root space to grow.
- cover your seed with potting mix, if required

KIRKENDALL GARDEN CLUB



**STEP 3 - LABEL, SEAL & PUT OUTSIDE**

- write and add your weatherproof label into the container - optional: you can write it onto the duct tape (after you seal it)
- seal up your container with duct tape
- place your containers outside in a spot that remains undisturbed during the winter, so you don't accidentally step on them or shovel them once they are covered in snow. They don't have to be in full-sun, part-sun will work fine, and you can relocate them in the spring after the snow melts if you wish

KIRKENDALL GARDEN CLUB



**STEP 4 - THE WAITING GAME**

The only thing left to do now is ignore them until spring. If you dampened your soil very well when you sowed your container, they shouldn't need watering until some time in mid spring. After the snow has melted and it warms up, keep an eye on them to watch for sprouting action (share photos!), monitor seedling growth and also monitor the soil moisture to check if when they need a bit of gentle watering (they may get enough water from snow/rain until mid spring) - it is best to water once the seal is broken, rather than through the small top, as it may damage the seedlings.

Once nighttime temps are reliably above zero Celsius and they are getting very warm during the day, you can remove the tape and open your greenhouses, just bend them back on the hinge - I sometimes use a wooden clothespin. If you can relocate them into full-sun that's great, if not part-sun will still be fine.

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**STEP 5 - TRANSPLANT OR POT UP**

- Some time in late spring or early summer when the seedlings have outgrown their container, you will be ready to either transplant your seedlings into the garden (if the timing is right) or pot them up to grow on before transplanting (or sharing!) them
- Your winter-sown plants are already naturally hardened off.
- Rinse out and save your containers to use again next winter, they should last several years
- Teach a friend or neighbour to winter sow!

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# Unceasing Prayer

BEV GROOMBRIDGE

When we were little children we knelt beside our beds,  
And with our parents' guidance our bedtime prayers were said.  
It was very much the same prayer that we said every night,  
We had memorized it perfectly; we knew we'd say it right!

As we grew into adulthood, our prayers began to change,  
There was now no special format that had to be arranged.  
We began to talk to Jesus, tell Him all our doubts and fears  
Still, we only prayed at bedtime throughout those many years.

As the intimacy we felt in Him grew within our heart,  
And we realized His love for us never would depart.  
We began just speaking to Him, no special posture, time or space  
No intricate words were needed, to receive His love and grace.

When we're walking with our closest friends the dialogue goes on,  
We talk about what's happening, what's right and what is wrong.  
We share our happy moments, and we share the bad times too.  
So it is with Jesus, as we walk, we talk things through.

Prayer's just conversation between Jesus and ourselves,  
As we give Him all our problems, all our fears He will dispel.  
We thank Him for His blessings all around us every day,  
And He smiles and whispers to us, "I am with you all the way".

Praying in church is beautiful it fills our hearts and soul,  
Praying together intentionally helps to make the body whole.  
With our eyes closed or open, doing the tasks we do each day  
Let us all pray without ceasing and let Jesus guide our way.



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# Rainbow Kings and Queens Celebrate Christmas in Canada

On Christmas Day over 200+ asylum seekers and refugees came together for the Rainbow Kings and Queens Christmas in Canada celebration. This afternoon potluck was hosted at the Afro-Caribbean Caribbean

Association Hall and was supported by St. Matthew's House. What started as a small WhatsApp group of 12 people a year ago, in February 2024, has grown to a group of over 300 members who meet monthly at

Mylar Hall in Christ's Church Cathedral.

The idea came when Deirdre Pike, the diocesan program consultant for justice and outreach spoke with one of the members and they realized it would be

beneficial to create a safe space for refugees from Uganda and Ghana who were forced to flee their countries due to their LGBTQIA+ identities. These countries have some of the harshest laws and punishments

in the world for the LGBTQIA+ community including death. This group has allowed its members to gather and share their stories, learn together about life in Canada, and celebrate their truest selves.



A group photo.



Deirdre Pike poses with Santa.

# Giving Tuesday Donations are Making a Difference

In November 2023, Bishop Susan Bell launched a Giving Tuesday Food Security special appeal in response to the growing need for food security across the diocese. The first appeal in 2023 supported 22 parish food security initiatives, and through the 2024 appeal, grants were made to 10 parishes.

This support was made possible thanks to a generous donation of \$10,000, by Palestinian Canadian, who in response to the devastation arising from the war in Gaza was moved to respond locally with this generous act of care and compassion for our neighbours.

Almost 12 per cent of households in the diocese were worried that there wouldn't be enough to eat and according to Food Banks Canada, food banks across the country have seen over two million visitors in 2024, with children representing 700,000 of these visits. A report from Feed Ontario shows that food banks in Ontario have seen one million of those visitors.

Forty per cent of food bank users rely on social assistance or disability-related supports and 18 per cent are currently employed, making this year the highest ever recorded for employed visitors.

"Sadly, the needs facing our neighbours are only growing," says Bishop Bell in the launch of the appeal. "But our churches are responding in extraordinary ways—being the face and hands of Christ—through the generosity of our parishioners and the communities we serve."

Responding to this need are parishes like All Saints Lutheran Anglican Church in Guelph where they host the Silvercreek Community Market. This market has been offering free fresh produce to our local community since 2017. In 2023 they distributed food to 7,191 people and had served 7,368 (2,948 of these are children) at the end of November 2024!

The SCM is located in a community that scores very low in Public Health's Social Determinants of Health. Many local families experience food insecurity and market guests are very diverse, including newcomers, Indigenous families, and include food drop offs at a Guelph Assisted Living building for those with mobility challenges after each Market.



Christ's Church Cathedral in Hamilton partners with St. Matthew's House to offer a safe space in the community.

Families shop once a month (on the first or third Thursday) and we offer refreshments while they wait. It is a choice-based market geared to family size rather than giving everyone a set hamper. There is a lot of chatting and smiles as people wait their turn to shop!

The Silvercreek Community Market has used their grant in 2023 to purchase fresh, nutritious produce and they intend to do the same this year. This sees that a variety of nutritious options are available to market guests including apples, bananas, broccoli, cabbage, carrots, garlic, ginger, kale, lemons, okra, onions, oranges, potatoes, spinach, and eggs. Shoppers get to choose the items they want and the amount they receive is geared to family size. All families of four plus, get a dozen eggs, smaller families may only get 1/2 dozen.

Michele Altermann, administrative assistant at All Saints shares gratitude on behalf of the parish and the market "Thank you again to the diocese for their support. If you saw how happy people are to be able to receive nutritious fresh produce, you would know why we have no intention of stopping this program!"

Elizabeth Wensley, deputy rector's warden at Christ's Church Cathedral in Hamilton shared how your support met some of the needs of the Cathedral Café.

"Since December 2023, Christ's Church Cathedral has been a partner—with St. Matthew's House (SMH) and the Diocese of Niagara—in a city-funded warming centre for people experiencing housing and food insecurity called "The Cathedral Café" says Wensley "Through the café and many other initia-

tives, the Cathedral has become known as a congregation with a heart for people who don't have enough material resources to live with dignity. As a result, our clergy and staff often face requests for help from people who can't make it to the end of the month with enough money for groceries."

To address the issue, the Cathedral used the food security grant received in December 2023 to buy gift cards for the discount grocery store within walking distance of the church. During the week, The Cathedral Café is able to offer two meals a day and refer guests to longer-term help to skilled St. Matthew's House staff working in the café. Many emergency requests however come on Sunday mornings when the café isn't open. The gift cards are a way to bridge people for a day or so until St. Matthew's House social service staff are available again.

St. George's in Guelph is another parish to use the grant for gift cards. For people who are unhoused and living in encampments, St. George's found providing non-perishable items was not helpful, since many of those seeking the support of the parish do not have access to a kitchen or materials to prepare the food. Laura Keller shares "these gift cards allow for those who are unsheltered to access a hot meal, especially during times where no meal programs are operating, like on Sundays."

"The gift cards also provide choice and independence to those experiencing hunger. We maintain cards from a variety of restaurants and allow those who ask for them to pick what they would like" says Keller. "They also get the chance to pick what meals that they would like at



Photos: Andrew Matthews



All Saints Lutheran Anglican Church in Guelph hosts the Silvercreek Market, offering free fresh produce to the local community.

Photo: Michele Altermann

the restaurant, an opportunity that isn't always available for those who rely on soup kitchens and meal centres."

Parishes are truly meeting the needs of their communities in diverse ways. St. Michael's in Hamilton used their 2023 grant to purchase an outdoor community fridge. The fridge is accompanied by a separate pantry, located in a cheerfully painted shed that says, "Take what you need, leave what you can." The fridge was opened in August of 2024 and was already a huge success with both donors to the pantry and the neighbours in need. For 2025, St. Michael's hopes to use their

grant to add solar lighting to the area for safety in the evenings, a widened, accessible pathway and an additional pantry to be used for storage.

Many parishes across the diocese are offering remarkable services like Sunday lunch programs, hygiene and food banks, community lunches and dinners, and meal bag programs. If you would like to support one of these programs contact your local parish to find out what ministries or programs may be in place in the parish or community.



# Human Trafficking in Niagara

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

tor, Restorations and Nancy's House, Burlington, and Jennifer Richardson, the first director of Ontario's Anti-Human Trafficking Office and a survivor of human trafficking herself. Each unique perspective provided a full picture of the reality that, indeed, human trafficking is in our own backyards, in large urban centres, as well as mid-size and small towns, and rural settings.

If you missed this year's forum, stay tuned! The response to the gathering was so positive, the committee is working on replicating the event to take place in St. Catharines in October of 2025.

HTJN works on four pillars to address human trafficking—prayer, education, action, and advocacy. As a move toward both education and action, the group shared resource pamphlet at the forum which has been created for distribution throughout the diocese. The resource contains information for individuals and parishes on

the education and action front.

Another way parishes will continue the work of Human Trafficking Justice Niagara, is by marking Freedom Sunday in 2025. While the Anglican Church of Canada typically marks this day of prayer and education on the 4th Sunday of February, just after Feb. 22, the day Canadian parliament passed a national Human Trafficking Awareness Day in 2007. However, other organizations like the Anglican Alliance promote the idea that parishes are free to choose any Sunday to mark Freedom Sunday.

With this in mind, Human Trafficking Justice Niagara would like to encourage you to use the resources created and shared on the diocesan website this past February. They are very much relevant for marking Freedom Sunday in 2025. If you have any questions, please contact Deirdre Pike, justice and outreach program consultant, [deirdre.pike@niagaraanglican.ca](mailto:deirdre.pike@niagaraanglican.ca).

## SIGNS OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING

While no single indicator is necessarily proof of human trafficking, recognizing the signs is the first step in identifying potential victims.

Does the individual...

- Show signs of physical abuse (bruises, broken bones, burns, scarring, etc.)?
- Appear to be deprived of food, water, sleep, medical care, and other necessities?
- Have unexplained absences from worship services?
- Suddenly become quiet, avoid eye contact, and keep their head down?
- Defer to another person to speak for them or appear to be coached on what they say?
- Have a difficult time providing logical answers to basic questions?
- Act fearful, anxious, depressed, submissive, tense, nervous, paranoid, or disassociated ("checked out")?

From the Human Trafficking Niagara resource



# Vestry Season Gets Underway

## THE VENERABLE BILL MOUS

From about mid-January through to the end of February, the Church observes an important period in its life, albeit one that is not in its official calendar: vestry season.

Annual vestry meetings are a parish's equivalent of an annual general meeting. Unlike other non-profit organizations, we like to get a head start on things and organize them at the start of the year. The canons require meetings to have happened no later than March 1. These meetings serve to gather a parish congregation to reflect upon the year that was and chart a course for the year ahead, guided by the Spirit's leading.

Wondering if you're a member of a vestry? Well, according to our diocesan canons, if you're baptised, 16 years of age or older, and have been involved in a congregation for at least 6 months, you are a member of vestry. If you're involved in more than one parish, however, you can only vote at one meeting.

One of the great things about

vestry meetings is that they create the space for the whole membership of a parish to contemplate how God's mission is being lived out locally. This discerning work is essential for parishes to undertake with prayerful intentionality. Time and again, wisdom is shared during vestry meetings that helps a parish more faithfully live into its ministry plans.

In recent weeks, parish administrators, wardens, and clergy have been spending a fair bit of time and energy in preparation for their vestry meetings. Reports are being prepared, finances and budgets are firmed up, discerning conversations about inviting people to serve in various capacities are underway, and all the details that make for a successful meeting are being planned.

At annual vestry meetings, the business of the Church is conducted: financial statements for the previous year are received, and churchwardens, lay representatives to Synod, and Parish Council members are elected or appointed. In addition,

a budget for the coming year is typically approved and any other business connected with the temporalities of the parish is transacted.

There is often discussion about a particular ministry or mission action plan, a stewardship campaign, or some other matter related to parish or community life, such as a response to a current justice issue.

At Synod, we renewed our diocesan Mission Action Plan (MAP), and there may well be some conversation about how that gets worked out locally, alongside the parish's own MAP.



What does it mean to be called to life and compelled to love? How are we being ignited by the irresistible love of Jesus and renewed by the Holy Spirit? How are we seeking to partner with God to deepen faith, join God's mission, and care for God's world?

These are good and important questions to ponder; vestry meetings offer a great opportunity to do just that as parishes reflect on their many and various ministries.

If your parish has already completed a Mission Action Plan (MAP), as many have at this

point, a vestry meeting is also a great time to review it, to receive updates, to make refinements, and to resource the initiatives arising from the MAP so that they are enacted in the year ahead. If your parish hasn't yet, it's a good opportunity to make a plan to do so as a goal for the year ahead.

Normally vestry meetings take place in person, creating an opportunity for people from different services to share a time of fellowship in addition to the business of the meeting. New regulations approved by Synod Council do, however, create the possibility for vestry meetings to be conducted online with the permission of the bishop.

Whatever matters find their way on the agenda of your vestry meeting, I hope and pray that your meeting will create the space for the people of God to discern and resource the missional work to which your parish has been called. May it be so in all the parishes of our diocese this vestry season.

Photo: Unsplash/Sincerely Media

# Apply Today for the Youth Leadership Training Program 2025



designed to equip young people with the skills and confidence to take on active leadership roles within their parishes and communities.

This unique, residential experience fosters an inclusive and welcoming environment, where participants explore their faith, identity, and relationship with God. Set against the beautiful backdrop of Canterbury Hills Camp, youth will learn to lead, listen, and observe how God's kingdom is unfolding around them.

If this opportunity resonates with you, we encourage you to apply today!

"Life-changing, fun, moving, challenging, and filled with Jesus," are words used to describe the Youth Leadership Training Program (YLTP) by previous participants.

We are now accepting applications from youth ages 12 - 15 across the diocese of Niagara.

YLTP is a dynamic leadership training program offered by the diocese during March Break,

**YLTP Dates:** March 9 - March 12, 2025

**Location:** Canterbury Hills Camp (Dundas)

**Application deadline:** February 14, 2025

**To Apply:** Contact Sarah Bird: [sarah.bird@niagaraanglican.ca](mailto:sarah.bird@niagaraanglican.ca)



Images from YLTP 2024.

Photos: Contributed by Sarah Bird



## Retired Clergy Luncheon

Nearly 60 retired clergy and their spouses gathered in December for a luncheon at Sotiris Restaurant in Burlington. Bishop Susan Bell, addressing the group, shared how appreciative she is of this faithful group of disciples, who continue to support God's mission of love through their prayers and ministries.



## Save the Date!

The annual Bishop's Company Dinner returns May 13th, 2025. Members will be invited to join Bishop Susan Bell at Carmen's Event Centre in Hamilton. More event details to come. For more information about the Bishop's Company, including how it supports the clergy and lay leaders of our diocese and how to become a member, visit: [niagaraanglican.ca/bishops-company/](http://niagaraanglican.ca/bishops-company/)



# Blasphemy: Because Indifference is a Danger to Faith



**THE REVEREND MICHAEL COREN**

"The only way to the truth" said the very Catholic US novelist Flannery O'Connor, "is through Blasphemy." Could someone please send her books to British Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer, because his response to Labour MP Tahir Ali in the House of Commons in London recently was as puny as it was disturbing. The Labour backbencher asked, "Will the prime minister commit to introducing measures to prohibit the desecration of all religious texts and the prophets of the Abrahamic religions?"

Rather than explaining that the right to question or mock religious faith was a fundamental right in any free society, and that even a hint of a blasphemy law was anathema in the free world, the British Prime

Minister said with consummate passivity, "Desecration is awful, and I think it should be condemned across the House. We are committed to tackling all forms of hatred and division including Islamophobia in all its forms."

Sir Keir Starmer's supporters have described his answer as "reasonable under the circumstances", those circumstances presumably being that Tahir Ali's riding is majority Muslim, a voting bloc the Labour Party can't afford to lose.

But is such desecration "awful"? It's certainly distasteful, as a priest I vehemently oppose it, and at its worst, as with Nazi book-burning, it can be a precursor to something far worse. But my major concern is for people rather than objects, and the hideously ironic truth is that people are killed in the name of a similar religious fundamentalism that would introduce blasphemy laws.

It's too glib to blame all of this on conservative Islam. Death for blasphemy has a history in ancient Judaism and not-so-ancient Christianity. Blasphemy laws even still exist in parts of the Christian world but they're seldom if ever applied, and today the worst that would happen if a Bible were burnt would be a few angry demonstrators and a

guest appearance on a comedy special lauding atheism.

I preach every week, argue the Christian case, and take part in debates with non-believers who bring every cliché and insult they can to the debate. It warms my heart. Because the greatest danger to faith is indifference, people not opposing but simply ignoring. We drown in a sea of irrelevance. "If it works for you that's great but don't bother me about it." I think I'd almost prefer it if they stamped on a prayer book!

I realize that the Koran holds a unique place in Muslim theology and consciousness, that behind textual destruction can be racism and hatred, and to destroy anyone's holy book is cruel and foolish. But without freedom of speech, even when it's deeply offensive, there can be no authentic freedom of religion, which at its best demands an informed and often challenged acceptance.

The mission field is no longer fenced in by triumphalism, social norms, or state power and as Christians, we need to be able to argue and defend our faith, just as Paul insisted we do when he had to do the same, in much more dangerous circumstances than most of us face today. The early church was a victim of blasphemy laws, then tragically

adopted the same to suppress opposition and dissent. Thank God that we've reached a stage where we see how wrong and un-Christian all of that was.

I still cringe when I recall in 1979 how Monty Python's *Life of Brian* was banned in certain ostensibly Christian countries – even in liberal, progressive Norway – especially when if viewed properly the movie says a great deal that is deeply useful to the thinking and searching Christian. The banning, naturally, only helped the film's publicity and profile.

We've been given minds as well as souls and have the ability to see what is good and right, and what is the opposite. Of course, it stings to see what we value, what we love, what we live by, mocked and even desecrated. But what matters are not the actions of those who like to outrage but the responses of those they wish to offend. Blaspheyme if you feel the need but know that it says nothing at all about the truth of faith. The Gospels are so much stronger than that.

### Correction Notice:

In the December 2024 edition of the Niagara Anglican, in the column by Michael Coren titled "Forgiveness without An Apology" there was an error in the caption. The photo was of Michael Coren and actor John Lithgow after Lithgow's performance of Roald Dahl in *Giant* by Mark Rosenblatt. The caption was mistakenly labeled as Michael with Roald Dahl himself. We sincerely apologize for this error and any confusion it may have caused.

– Dani Leitis, Editor of the Niagara Anglican



Photo: iStock/Faiz Dila

## Niagara Anglican Deadlines and Submission Guidelines

### Upcoming Deadlines:

- April – February 21
- May – March 28
- June – April 25

### 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](mailto:editor@niagaraanglican.ca)

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# Theology on the Beach: Gregory the Great



**THE REVEREND DR. DANIEL TATARNIC**

It was a brilliant summer day as I packed my satchel with water, sunscreen, bug spray, and a biography of Gregory the Great. Time to hit the beach! It's a running joke in our family. Sane people visit beaches to tan; I visit beaches to read theology. And what better place for theology-on-the-beach than Savage Harbour, Prince Edward Island. It is the heart of the world, and coffee always tastes better at High Tide.

Contemporary Anglicans may wonder, why bother? Is there anything less relevant than a sixth-century pope? Good question. Let's give it some thought. First, Gregory is the Roman Bishop responsible for commissioning Augustine to re-establish relations with Anglo-Christians. Second, Augustine establishes the See and becomes the first Archbishop of Canterbury. In terms of apostolic continuity, Gregory is a significant person in Anglicanism. He is also a bond of unity with Catholic and Orthodox Christians with whom we have this person in common.

There is much to be said about Gregory and why he is called great, and more will follow. Suffice it to say that from occupying the chair of the Roman Senate at an early age, his sudden withdrawal into monastic life, his ambassadorial assignments to the imperial court of Constantinople, to his election as bishop of Rome, he lived a remarkable life in remarkable times. When Gregory becomes Pope in 590, plague is sweeping through Italy. The once robust and prosperous capital city is reduced to one-fifth of its former population. Lombard invaders sack it repeatedly; civilization meets an abrupt end. God abandons the Eternal City

to famine, flood, and barbarians.

In the destabilizing whirlwind of its fall, the leisure class fled to Ravenna and Constantinople. Few remain in Rome to provide education. Few are able-bodied to form an army. Hardly a soul is left in situ to govern civic affairs. Corpses rot where they drop; there is not enough labour to bury the dead. Life in the city is a daily dose of despair.

By the time Gregory's prede-

The giftedness that distinguished his former life as chair of the Senate, as ambassador to Byzantium, and a man of letters and law, did not diminish during his retreat into monastic life. He emerges as a formidable saint whose leadership is the dawn of a new era. But he wasn't just a competent administrator, he was a visionary who had occupied his time in the trenches. He was a man of deep faith, strong

to reform his own internal life. Gregory's biggest move was to normalize an expectation that the mission of the ordained was to focus more upon the care of souls and not merely the administration of resources. It was a new and radical way of understanding Christian leadership. The same would be said about the role of monasteries / convents, under the spiritual guidance of an Abbot / Abbess.

Why is this relevant? Well, it is the first time in Christian history that local priests are charged explicitly with responsibility for the spiritual nurture of dynamic communities of faith and service. But healthy communities need healthy leaders. Where was this to come in the wake of devastation? Without a militia, Gregory mobilized the army he did have at his disposal – the church. Parishes become dynamic units of mission, under the pastoral care of the clergy. The clergy are to be spiritual directors and not just administrators and sacrament dispensers. Therefore, what was once expected of monks and monastics becomes an expectation for all the clergy. They are to lead from a place of disciplined prayer and discernment, in the trenches, in the communities. Gregory himself writes, "They have made you a leader...be among them as one of them." The word he uses for this office of pastoral leadership is *rectores*.

For Gregory, the parish priest is spiritual director (*rectores*) in the local context. Interesting since the term associated with episcopal office is *pontiff* (*pontem*) meaning bridge. To be a bishop, therefore, is to aide the work of discernment done at the local level and to bridge that work — at the local — with the work being done throughout the Church. He insisted that a new model of co-resonating servant leadership was required to affect real transformation. In fact, Gregory coined the phrase that is now commonplace when referring to the work of bishops, "Servant of the Servants of God."

Gregory's way of unifying the whole people of God across a continent rent by plague, warfare, and spiritual paralysis was to build bridges between people of goodwill (including Arians and non-Christians). He redefines what it means to be a spiritual director during an age of anxiety and malaise. He was formed in the messiness of the trenches. He led from messy trenches, and this is what makes him a compelling example for all who aspire to leadership: among them as one of them.



Photo: Unsplash/Jessica Hearn

cessor, Pelagius II, succumbs to plague the people are emotionally and spiritually numb. The eyes of the city turn in one direction. What remains of the *Senatus Populusque Romanus* alight on a man they hope will re-animate dry bones. Animate he does.

conviction, and intense spiritual discipline. He was humble yet self-possessed and he led from a place of authenticity. Gregory never demanded from others what he was not willing to do himself.

He knew how to reform clerical orders because he knew how

Under the aegis of Gregory's Rule, spiritual discipline became the new normal. Lively communities of faith began pumping oxygen into the dry bones of a fallen Empire. Gregory was able to effect monumental and lasting change in the Church and society.