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NIAGARA ANGLICAN

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

A section of the Anglican Journal



JANUARY 2026

The Journey of Light

From New Year to Epiphany



THE REVEREND CANON BAHMAN KALANTARI

As the New Year opens, the Scriptures guide us toward Epiphany—the revelation of divine Light. What stands out is the extraordinary activity of angels, God's messengers, moving not among the powerful but among ordinary people. Ordinary men and women, by God's choice, become exemplary. Their conviction and acceptance of God's message shape the course of human history.

The angelic presence begins in a family. A young couple, meek and humble, receives repeated

visits from angels, announcing the coming of a child—a child who is more than a child. Heaven itself attends this birth, whispering, "This is God's work. Pay attention." Light and wonder dwell in their home, softly illuminating the ordinary with the extraordinary.

The angelic phenomenon must first extend to the shepherds—awake in the night, knowing well the land, the flock, the water resources, and the shelter. They are independent, detached, caring, and connected to creation, and they are the first to hear: Good news of great joy. Though the Light appears in one family

and then to a part of the community, it is for the world.

Now, an unexpected radiance appears to unique regal scholars from a distant land. God speaks in their language: through the heavens, through familiar signs. The radiance guides them, step by step, to the Light, the child. Yet darkness is now disturbed. Corrupt authorities sense a threat and seek to capture the Light, but it escapes their grasp. Guided by angels, the family flees, carrying the little light like a lamp through the shadows of the world.

When oppression fades, the Light returns and grows "in wis-

dom and in stature," hidden from watchful eyes. Another figure appears—the voice of justice. Detached, prepared, and devoted, the voice calls for justice and opens the gate. The Light comes in to be immersed, marking a new revelation, a new liberation. The voice witnesses the heavens open, and the Spirit descends. The voice is now relieved and assured. Observers watch and begin to discern the unfolding dance of Light in the world.

The Light begins calling companions—ordinary people again—who follow without fully understanding. Later, at a wedding feast, a place of limited

resources, the Light transforms water, an unnoticed treasure, into the wine of joy—honour and abundance are restored. The ordinary becomes extraordinary, revealing the first sign of glory, a quiet miracle woven into everyday life.

As the New Year leads us toward Epiphany, these narratives guide our lives. We come to expect angelic presence—inspiration, guidance, and moments that open our hearts—visiting families who await the Light. The family remains the first dwelling for the divine presence,

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150th Anniversary of Cathedral's Consecration

ALEXANDER (SANDY) L. DARLING

On January 1, 1876, Christ's Church Hamilton was consecrated as the cathedral of the Diocese of Niagara, which had been established in 1875. The parish of Christ's Church was established in 1835 by the Reverend John Gamble Geddes, who was sent by the Bishop of Quebec to develop the Church

of England in this region. A wooden church, designed by Richard Charles Wetherall, the architect of Dundurn Castle, was subsequently built. It was a large church in the Palladian Baroque style that was 100 feet long and 60 feet wide. People referred to it as "Geddes' church", but he insisted that it was Christ's Church, a name that was then used, unlike the more common "Christ Church".

By the early 1850s, the railway came to Hamilton, which was growing into a sizable town at the head of navigation. Richard Thomas, a notable architect from Toronto, was hired to design a larger stone building that included a chancel and a tower that was never built. A shortage of funds meant that only the first two bays and a sixteen-foot

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Photo: William Pleydon

Forest Church Movement Offers Hope and Connection

THE REVEREND JANICE BROOKS

In a world where headlines are dominated by chaos, confusion, and climate change, a growing movement is inviting people to slow down and reconnect with hope—by stepping outside. A Forest Church practitioner, the Reverend Rachel Summers, recently held a Forest Church workshop at Canterbury Hills, which is drawing attention for its unique approach to a missional spirituality: worshipping in nature. It is also a good model for engaging with those who have left churches or have no experience of Christianity.

Forest Church is not simply a traditional church service relocated outdoors. Instead, it seeks to engage with creation itself and reach beyond church, blending ancient traditions with modern research on the benefits of spending time in wild places. “Forest Church is a movement rather than an organization,” explained the Reverend Rachel Summers, a pioneer of the movement and author of *Messy Church Goes Wild; Wild Advent and Wild Lent*. “It grows organically out of different areas, shaped by the context it’s rooted in—like wine, you can tell where it’s grown by its terroir.”

Participants at the workshop described moments of deep connection and inspiration. The Reverend Canon Cheryl Barker, rector of St. George’s in Georgetown, said, “The Forest



The Reverend Rachel Summers, leader of the Forest Church workshop.

All Photos: Sue Hawthorne-Bate

Church workshop surprised me with how much I have been missing by putting worship into four walls. Being outside and feeling a part of God’s creation made me feel more connected to Jesus’ message. What a joyful experience to be with God in nature and feel like a kid again!”

The workshop also highlighted a startling statistic: children today spend less time outdoors than people in prison. “We tell them the outdoors is dangerous, yet we give them a smartphone and tell them to stay in and play online,” Summers noted. According to a 2023 survey by Tearful Canada and A Rocha, 88% of young people see caring for creation as essential to the Gospel message, but two-thirds say the church isn’t doing

enough—or hasn’t even mentioned creation care in sermons or outreach.

Summers encouraged participants to deepen their understanding by reading eco-theologians, especially Canadian Indigenous writers such as the Reverend Dr. H. Daniel Zacharias and Reverend Dr. Christopher White.

Nicole Smith, a training commissioned lay missionary, said she was inspired by the practical examples for building community among the dechurched and unchurched. “Mission needs to be about holding space for communities that have a vital life of their own, not just pipelines for church attendance.”

For many, Canterbury Hills itself has played a vital role in nurturing creation-focused



Workshop participants (l-r) Frank Doyle, The Reverend Canon Cheryl Baker and the Reverend Deacon Nancy McBride chat during a break.

spirituality. The Reverend Canon Dr. Barry Randle of St. Paul’s, Caledonia emphasized that Forest Church can help believers take seriously their baptismal promise to safeguard the integrity of God’s creation. Sarah Bird, missional formation coordinator for the Anglican Diocese of Niagara, stated, “I also valued her [Rachel Summer’s] insight that the outdoors offers a welcoming, sensory-rich space for everyone, including those who are neurodivergent.

“Forest Church is an important form of eco-missional initiative that opens up the Christian faith through direct encounter with nature,” said The Reverend Canon Dr. Ian Mobsby, diocesan community missionary for the Diocese of Niagara. “It creates

sacred spaces where de- and unchurched children, youth, and adults can experience God’s presence in the natural world. We are deeply grateful to the Reverend Rachel Summers, ordained pioneer priest, for sharing her wisdom and experience in helping us explore this transformative expression of missional church.”

As climate concerns grow and traditional church attendance declines, Forest Church offers a fresh path—one rooted in contemplation, community, and care for the earth. In closing, Bird offered, “The Forest Church experience was a beautiful reminder that faith and nature are deeply intertwined, and that sacred encounters can happen anywhere.”

Lay Service to the Church and Beyond Recognized

In November 54 people were inducted into the Order of Niagara over the course of two weekends, November 16th and November 23rd. This order is a lay order of people who have given of themselves their time and talents to the church, their community, and the diocese. Welcoming the inductees, Bishop Susan expressed her deep gratitude for their service, “I say this truly, without these examples of service in which we see the light of Christ, there would be no ministry of the Church to speak of. You are the Church...thank you all for all that you give, and all that you do in Christ’s name, but most of all, thank you for who you are.”



On November 16, people from Greater Wellington and Trafalgar regions were inducted to the Order of Niagara



On November 23, the induction ceremony recognized people from Brock, Lincoln, and Hamilton-Haldimand regions.

Photos: William Pleydon

Anniversary of Cathedral's Consecration

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chancel could be built by 1855, resulting in what was called the hump-backed church. Thomas then took his plans to St Andrew's (now St Paul's) Presbyterian congregation, so one may see the tower that Christ's Church never had. In the early 1870s, the three western stone bays were added using the designs of Henry Langley, a Toronto architect.

The final stage of building the cathedral we know today was the lengthening of the chancel in 1925 to 48 feet and adding the sacristy and dean's vestry with organ lofts above. The design was undertaken by William Palmer Witton, a Hamilton architect. Although we glibly talk of "lengthening the chancel", this involved taking down the east wall and window and rebuilding it so that the window could be as it had been. Although the stone building was completed in three phases, the design is essentially that of William Thomas, because Langley and Witton both followed the style he had set, so the new and old sections are seamless. A reader who wishes to read a more detailed description and analysis of the architecture of the building should read an article by Professor William Thurlby in the *Journal of the Society*



The east window

Photo: Google Places/Shaina Courney



First-time visitors to the cathedral are often awe-struck by the high vaulted ceiling designed by William Thomas.

Photo: © Alexander (Sandy) Darling

for the *Study of Architecture in Canada* 42 No. 1, 2017. Cathedrals have been centres of education and of music and arts. Cathedral schools were first established in the sixth century for the training of priests and the preservation of knowledge. The universities of Europe grew from them; some of the first were Bologna in the 12th century and Oxford and Cambridge shortly thereafter. Christ's Church Cathedral today maintains a vigorous educational program. It also has a long choral tradition, and directors of music have established or led many choirs in the city. The building has served as a venue for visiting choirs on North American tours. Both music and art displays are

presented during monthly art crawls from May to October and at Supercrawl in September, which together attract 10,000 visitors annually. The building itself is a testament to the visual arts. The high ceilings provide space for large stained-glass windows, the earliest of which, dating from 1853, was designed by Ballantine and Allen of Edinburgh. Commercial firms developed in the 1830s to 1850s, just before the growth of Neo-Gothic churches like the cathedral. In Canada, the firm of McCausland was founded in 1857 and designed various windows in the cathedral. Two are notable: the east window, according to the newspaper report of its dedication, was the largest



Detail of cornice where the ceiling meets the interior wall of the cathedral.

Photo: © Alexander (Sandy) Darling

stained-glass window made in Canada, and the Annunciation window appeared in the Colonial and Indian Exhibition in London in 1885. There are six different manufacturers of windows, with over one hundred years between the oldest and youngest windows, so there is a great variety in styles. Most of the woodwork was carved by Valley City Manufacturing of Dundas, a leading firm in Canada. The splendid limestone reredos was carved in England by the leading supplier of ecclesiastical fixtures and supplies. The role of the cathedral in the diocese owes much to Bishop Ralph Spence, who saw the cathedra and the Cathedral as symbols of Anglican unity. He moved all confirmations, confer-

ring of the Order of Niagara, ordinations and installations to the Cathedral. The associated services bring together members of many congregations and provide greater support to candidates. The Cathedral and its congregation are very different from those my wife and I joined in 1975. It was then a very white, Anglo-Saxon congregation with little connection to the local community. Some of the notable changes were the initiation of a daycare around 1990, the development of Makers' Market and the opening of the Cathedral to visitors in the first decade of this century, and more recently the development of the Cathedral Café to minister to those in need. As such initiatives were introduced, the nature of the congregation changed to one that is more diverse and inclusive, and less formal. Rather than being internally focused, the Cathedral and its congregation look outward to serve and welcome others. Christ's Church Cathedral is the mother church of the Diocese of Niagara. Bishop Susan Bell and Dean Tim Dobbin invite you to celebrate with us the 150th anniversary of the Cathedral's consecration at our 10.30 a.m. service on Sunday, February 8, 2026.



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**CALLED to LIFE
COMPELLED to LOVE**

Don't Look Now



THE REVEREND DR. DANIEL TATARNIC

It was winter, nineteen eighty-two. The new annex and library at my grade school had just opened. And to showcase the new technology cart, which consisted of a television and VHS tape player, *Raiders of the Lost Ark* was showing in the library. I was six years old. We didn't have a VHS player at home. This was maximum-level state-of-the-art entertainment.

As it neared the end of the film, and the lid of the ark was opened, the lower school students were instructed to close

their eyes. This was the iconic face-melting scene. I squinted, but I didn't close my eyes. By the collective screams and sounds of disgust, I wasn't the only one!

As memorable as that movie was, it was the golden ark with its two angelic sentinels that impressed me most. It wasn't until I was an adult that I understood the symbolism. There, in the space between the cherubic wings, was a profound theological statement. The nothingness of space between the wings contained the image of Israel's God: no-thing.

Humans struggle with idolatry. We always have. We take something good, and we make it our god. The sticker shock of January's credit statements will be a reminder of that for millions of people. In all likelihood, it won't be collectively noticed or understood. The markets will not be pleased if we spend less this year than last. How we measure progress these days needs to be seriously reconsidered. But it won't. Elon won't allow it.

Our need to fill the gap, to fill

the void, to scratch the itch is exploited, packaged, and sold back to us at a premium. We willingly pay the price to buy back our own enslavement. To desire No-Thing is wild and unpredictable; silence unnerves. We speak of saving the environment, yet do disproportionately little to address the spiritual crisis, our cultural obsession with consumption. We are enslaved, and ironically, our enslavement is being marketed and sold back to us.

Even as a lower-schooler, I understood the moral import of the scene from *Indiana Jones*; that when the lid of the ark of the covenant was opened to reveal a box filled with sand, not treasure, there was something profound being communicated to the audience. Toht laughs hysterically at the sight of the dust. But, as spectral images encircle the entourage, Belloq cries out, "It's beautiful". Indiana tells Marion, "Don't look at it. Shut your eyes, Marion. Don't look at it no matter what happens."

The golden ark was beautiful; the spectral images enticed the



In *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, looking at the ark's contents made faces melt.
Photo: Lucasfilm Ltd. via mentalfloss.com

senses with their quasi-erotic seduction. What enchanted the soldiers was nothing more, and nothing less, than a mirror-reflection of their own disordered desire. And that's what brings the Nazis to their liquified demise. What is at first beautiful, enticing, and erotic, becomes hideous and corpse-like. They are driven to insanity by the very promise of the image of Israel's God: no-thing.

As the reverberation of November's sticker shock echoes through the halls of January, and all of that stuff becomes tomorrow's junk, and the spiritual

crisis behind it goes unattended, Indiana Jones' words aren't bad ones to reflect upon: "Don't look at it. Shut your eyes, Marion. Don't look at it, no matter what happens." The answer to the crisis is right in front of us, from Sinai to the present day. But what hope for transformation it offers us is No-thing. And God should have known that in a world defined by consumption, idolatry, and consumerism, you can't sell a negative. You can't sell no-thing. Then again, that is the paradox of Israel's God.

A Reflection of Bridges

THE REVEREND DEACON DOREEN HAYWOOD

SERVE ONE ANOTHER HUMBLY IN LOVE. —GALATIANS 5:13

January can often be a time when we pause and reflect on the past year. As I reflect, I am reminded of the words that, as ordination candidates, we chose as a summary of our time spent together—building bridges. This past year has been a year of bridges. A time of change and a time of community coming together. I have walked the path of helping others say goodbye to loved ones and journeying with them in their time of sadness. Others have crossed the bridge from independence to long-term care. There have been times helping others discover their faith and their newfound wonder in discovering what it means to be a follower of Christ.

As deacons, we are called to these paths and to journey with others. What a sacred invitation! An invitation to accompany others at a time when they are feeling most vulnerable. It is a time when the Holy Spirit is at work through us and with us. It

is a time of learning, not only for those we walk with – but for ourselves as well. Helping people discover their faith deepens our faith as well. Their questions and observations can some-

times lead us to think about the Gospel in a new way and open our hearts to receive Christ's teachings in ways we may never have thought of before.

Recently, during a baptism preparation class with a child, we read a Bible story. They listened



Photo: Unsplash/Asap PANG

intently and then said, "Is that even true?" That moment when they heard the Bible story for the first time was a bridge-building moment. A time of wondering for them, and a reminder to me that the familiar stories are not so familiar to those who are seeking to learn more.

Weekly, I lead worship in a retirement community in St. Catharines and then join them for a time of community at their coffee hour held the following day. It is a time to be of support, a time of conversation and a time to meet others who may not attend weekly services. Slowly, over time, the group has started sharing stories of their faith journeys and asking questions about my own. Different traditions coming together to discuss their faith experiences in their younger years and how they have grown in faith. It gives them an opportunity to ask questions and have discussions in an informal setting. A bridge to their past, their present and their faith.

The people and staff of Anchor Pointe have welcomed me into their community and lives. The relationship between St. John's (Port Dalhousie) and Anchor Pointe is growing. They have baked for our church bazaar and are exploring avenues for residents to attend special events at the church. The people of St. John's pray each week for the residents, and members of the congregation occasionally assist with worship services I lead in the chapel of Anchor Pointe. Footpaths and bridges are being formed between these 2 communities.

In the dark of January, these are the beacons of light that show that God is among us; God is at work. He is working through us and calling us to be builders of relationships, of communities and extensions of His love.

The Reverend Deacon Doreen Haywood serves at St. John's Port Dalhousie.



Advent Café Celebrates 10th Anniversary

ALLISON LYNN FLEMMING

One chilly winter night, in a lounge at St. George's Church in the heart of St. Catharines, a group of Anglicans gathered for something new. Little did they know that, a full decade later, the seeds they planted would still be growing.

This winter, Advent Café celebrates its tenth anniversary!

Back in 2015, the Reverend Canon Martha Tatarnic, co-rector, the Reverend Scott McLeod, associate priest, and lay leader Mari Shantz felt the call to start a midweek gathering. The parish received a WOW (Walking on Water) grant to help fund the creative venture. Offered by the Diocese of Niagara, WOW grants support "turning dreams into vibrant mission-centred ministries."

Despite the seasonal name, Advent Café is a year-round offering. As Tatarnic explains, "Advent is a season of expectation ... We chose the name Advent Café because this gather-

ing is about attending to God's presence and activity with new eyes, and looking for the surprising ways God shows up."

Advent Café's first gatherings met in an intimate cafe setting offering music, message, and a simple communion. A hospitality team served beverages and homemade sweets. "Out of the Cold" also met on Wednesdays, so some of their guests joined the worship. The congregation became a unique mix of lifelong faithful, returning prodigals, and members of our downtown housing-insecure community. Social and economic boundaries melted away as we sang and prayed together.

From the start, one of the signature features has been the rotating roster of musicians. Over the years, the congregation has been treated to hymns, pop, east coast folk, jazz, rock, and even musical theatre. The current roster is Brad Barnham (St. George's director of music), Tracie Cross (led by Brian Kerley), Ambush (led by Maxx

Schafrick), and Infinitely More (husband and wife duo, Allison and Gerald Flemming).

Many of the musicians have also written original songs for the worship. Infinitely More has recorded two albums of their own songs inspired by Advent Café. For each, the community hosted a CD release party, celebrating "their music" being shared with the wider world.

Advent Café's first decade has been filled with many such defining moments. People from all walks of life have shared authentic messages of their faith journey with the popular lay-preaching program.

During the pandemic lockdowns, leaders recorded prayers and songs from home, edited the pieces together, and streamed the service online. This past May, the team created "The Great Canadian Sing-along". The wider community filled the sanctuary to sing classics by Anne Murray, The Tragically Hip, and Stompin' Tom Connors. In the summer, Advent Café moves outside, bringing vibrant music, a community barbecue, and love-your-neighbour energy to the downtown core. During the recent World Series, clergy and musicians donned Blue Jays colours while the hospitality team served hot dogs, popcorn, and other game day fare.

The Reverend Canon Tom Vaughan, co-rector at St. George's describes Advent Café as "a place where the love of music harmonizes the stories of our world."

The past decade has brought change to our Advent Café community. Our current gatherings are focused on music and reflections inspired by a "hot topic." Tatarnic explains, "We try to pay attention to what people are talking about and to consider how music opens those conversations and where God meets us in those conversations ... This is about coming together as a community to create something beautiful and life-giving, and to look for how we make sure there is a space for everyone around the table."

Advent Café's 10th anniversary is Wednesday, January 28, 2026, 7:00 p.m., at St. George's Anglican Church, St. Catharines. Please join us for music, reflections, and cake!



The Reverend Canon Martha Tatarnic, MJ Schmidt, and Brian Kerley celebrate the World Series at Advent Cafe.

Photo: Martha Tatarnic



Infinitely More (Allison and Gerald Flemming) and Associate Priest The Reverend Scott McLeod (centre) lead Summer Advent Cafe on the front steps of St. George's.

Photo: Contributed by Allison Flemming

The Journey of Light

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1



a home where hope takes root, and ordinary life is touched with luminous grace.

Next, we look into the shepherds among us—those who know where life and nourishment are found. Caring, attentive, and aware, they teach us to see with eyes of experience and wisdom. We celebrate with them, learn from them, and journey together, walking as companions on the path of Light.

Then we come to notice those beyond our immediate circles—seekers from the four corners of the world, following new signs towards the Light. We accompany them, witnessing their journey on the road to the liberating Light, sharing in their wonder, wisdom, and excitement.

When darkness cringes and is threatened by the emancipating Light, we must unite—families, shepherds, and seekers—to embrace the Light tightly. With hearts, souls, and strength, we ensure it grows until no oppres-

sion can extinguish it, until it shines freely, spilling illumination into every hidden corner.

We now seek those who are called for the sake of justice—inspired to bring fairness and healing. We join them, hear the divine voice, witness the descent of the Spirit, and strengthen our faith, becoming vessels of Light in the world.

Finally, we are invited to the wedding feast—wearing our best clothes—to see how ordinary elements are transformed into abundance, joy, and blessing. Water becomes wine; ordinary moments reveal divine presence, grace, and celebration, reminding us that the sacred dwells within us, among us, and around us.

The journey from New Year to Epiphany is not merely historical. It teaches us to receive, guard, and share the Light, to accompany the faithful and the seekers, to recognize divine abundance in the ordinary moments of our lives as we prepare for the wedding.



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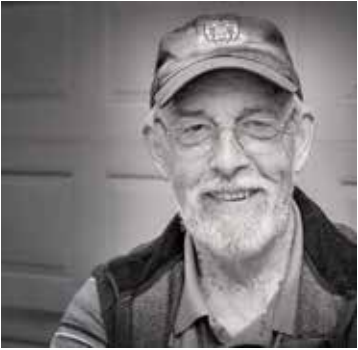
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In other words

Healthy Evangelism: What Does it Look Like? Part 2



JOHN BOWEN

So, churches are in decline, and the number of self-identifying Christians is going down in Canada year by year. Why? There are lots of answers, some cultural, some intellectual, some experiential.

But here's an explanation we don't often think about: We don't provide places for people to begin. We seem to think that the average secular person, or even someone exploring their spirituality, can simply walk into a Sunday morning service of Eucharist and decide within the hour to be baptized. Yes, yes, I know it can happen—thanks be to God, such miracles occur—but only a small minority of people come to faith that way.

Some readers will remember when government money was made available to install ramps to make churches more accessible to those with physical handicaps. I've often thought it's too bad we don't take equal trouble to create spiritual ramps, to enable easy access to those who find the steps to regular church life too difficult or intimidating.

Continuing from last month, here are some that have a proven

track record:

4. Introductory courses

In the last thirty years or so, courses teaching the basics of Christianity have become very popular. There are many of them available from all across the Anglican spectrum, from Bishop John Spong's *Living the Questions* (on the theological left) all the way to Rico Tice's *Christianity Explored* (further to the right).

The most popular course is undoubtedly the Alpha course, which has been taken by millions of people around the world. I was at an evangelical Anglican church not long ago and, in the prayers of the people, I couldn't help noticing that they prayed for five adults who were to be baptized the following Sunday. I asked the priest where the five had come from, and she answered, "We just keep doing the Alpha program, and they keep coming!"

Alpha is not to everybody's theological taste, however. But when John Baycroft was the Bishop of Ottawa, he said to his clergy, "You don't have to do the Alpha program—but if you don't do it, you have to do something better!" Which seems to me a fair enough challenge.

Some clergy have invented their own courses, with names like *Christianity 101* and *Christianity Rediscovered*. I used to say to students at Wycliffe, "You should have some introductory course like this as part of your regular annual program, where you are teaching the faith to beginners." After all, where

else are beginners to begin?

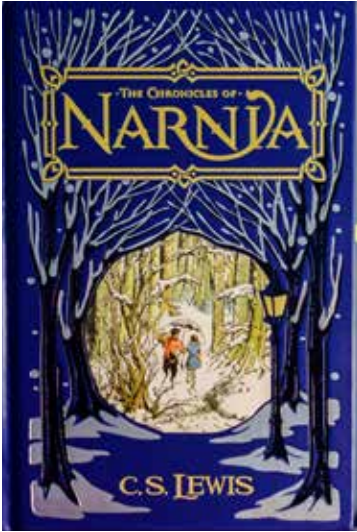
5. Celebrating Valentine's Day

When Harold Percy was the Rector of Trinity Anglican Church in Streetsville, one of the church's annual traditions was a dinner and dance at a nearby banqueting hall on the Saturday closest to Valentine's Day. "Where is the evangelism in that?" you may ask. Well, between the dinner and the dance, Harold would preach a sermon. "Oh goodness," you may say, "how inappropriate! How manipulative! Taking advantage of a captive audience like that!"

But wait. The sermon went something like this (I have never forgotten it):

You may be wondering why a church would celebrate Valentine's Day. Churches don't generally do anything special for Victoria Day or Groundhog Day, so why Valentine's Day? The reason is that Valentine's Day celebrates love, and we believe love is one of the Creator's best gifts to this world, so of course, we want to celebrate. And on a Sunday, some of us gather at Trinity Church over on the High Street to learn from the God who created love how to be better lovers. So, if you ever feel that you would like to be a better lover, we would be delighted to welcome you to Trinity one of these Sunday mornings. And now, let's get on with the dance!

I would say that is one of the best and briefest evangelistic sermons I have ever heard. It's succinct, it highlights just one important aspect of Christian



We could do much worse as evangelists than to recommend *The Chronicles of Narnia* to a non-church friend! Photo: Unsplash/Tim Alex

faith—learning to love—and it encourages people to respond without pressure and even with a little humour. I don't know about you, but I think that's brilliant.

6. Circumventing the Watchful Dragons

I have a friend, now a university professor, who grew up in a strongly atheistic family. Then one day, he discovered C.S.Lewis's Narnia stories and began to devour them in secret in his basement. This led him to put his trust in Jesus, to join a lively church, and ultimately to get ordained. C.S.Lewis knew what he was doing.

Lewis himself grew up as an Anglican, but declared himself an atheist by the age of fifteen, and remained so for a further fifteen years or so. Having come back to faith, he felt himself called to defend the faith, which

he did through non-fiction such as *Mere Christianity*, but also through fiction like the Narnia stories. This is how he described his motivation:

I thought I saw how stories of this kind could steal past a certain inhibition which had paralysed much of my own religion in childhood. . . Supposing that by casting all these things into an imaginary world, stripping them of their stained-glass and Sunday school associations, one could make them for the first time appear in their real potency? Could one not thus steal past those watchful dragons? I thought one could.

That image of the watchful dragons is a powerful one. It's not uncommon for people to react negatively to talk of church and religion negatively: "I don't want to talk about that stuff." "Church is full of hypocrites." "I believe in science, not faith." That's the watchful dragons, breathing out their fire, and it's often successful in repelling even the most gracious witness.

But the Narnia stories don't access the heart through the mind. They follow Emily Dickinson's advice, "Tell all the truth, but tell it slant." They circumvent our intellectual objections and speak directly to the imagination and thence to the heart. Not that the intellectual issues disappear, of course, just that they may come later.

We could do much worse as evangelists than to recommend *The Chronicles of Narnia* to a non-church friend!

To be continued.



Faith Celebrated at Cathedral Service

The fall was a busy season in our diocese, demonstrating beautiful celebrations of faith! On October 19, the fire of the Holy Spirit was on full display as 29 people were confirmed or received into the Anglican Church of Canada by Bishop Susan Bell at Christ's Church Cathedral.

Below: Bishop Susan delivers her charge to the candidates. Photos: William Pleydon



From Steps to Welcome

Historic St. Luke's Takes Steps to Accessibility

DAVID HUFFMAN

The small, rural church of St. Luke's, Smithville, Ontario, located in the hub of the Niagara Peninsula, has been actively taking giant steps towards being fully accessible to all people. This target, which was one of the very first Mission Action Plan (MAP) goals fully adopted by the congregation, has recently completed a major step forward. With the generous support of the Anglican Foundation of Canada (AFC), by means of a fifteen-thousand-dollar (\$15,000) grant, the front access to the church has undergone a complete upgrade. The Anglican Foundation grant was generously matched by support from a member of the church's congregation.

St. Luke's is an older church, constructed in 1885. At that time, accessibility was not a design or construction consideration. This is shown in the picture of the way the front of the church used to be, with its original three concrete steps. Although three steps don't sound like a lot, to a person with mobility restrictions, it might as well have been a mountain. For years, members, as they aged and developed problems, struggled to attend the small church that they loved so much. When Bishop Susan Bell, bishop of the Diocese of Niagara, introduced her new focus to the churches by way of The MAP process, the parishioners of St. Luke's took this as the impetus



The new accessible front entrance.

Photos: Contributed by David Huffman

they needed to create change. To accomplish the MAP program goal, St. Luke's divided the task of making all of the church and its facilities fully accessible into 'bite-sized' individual areas. Three major areas were identified as needing upgrades. The first area was the front access to the church. The second area was access to the church's community hall. The third area was the upgrade required for the washrooms. For a small church in a rural community, initially, this overall goal seemed impossible to achieve, but the congregation was determined to see it through. The Reverend Canon Dr. Eleanor Clitheroe, the parish rector, thoughtfully took the time necessary to lead the members of the parish corporation in multiple discussions on developing the plans and stages

necessary to complete the overall project. All design work was designed to meet and exceed the Ontario Accessibility guidelines. St. Luke's is fortunate to have as part of its leadership Stephen LaSalle, the parish deacon. LaSalle became a valuable asset and sounding board in setting the requirements that needed to be fulfilled. To date, most, but not all, of the accessibility needs of the church have been met. The door to the community hall has been replaced with a widened, automatically activated door along with a small ramp for its threshold. One of the hall restrooms was completely gutted to allow an increase of more than double its overall size. An enlarged automatically operated door was also installed. Inside, the toilet was changed to a raised model, and all the required handbars



The new accessible washroom.

were installed. The main entrance to the church proved to be a major undertaking, far greater than was anticipated. Bruce McFarlane, people's warden, became the lead church member to assess and provide solutions to the various problems that surfaced during the construction. One of the main issues was the underground services to the church. These services became an issue for the concrete work that needed to be done. As luck would have it, the main sewage drain line for the church and the community hall, as well as the hydro feed lines, were buried directly in the path where the new church entrance platform had to go. McFarlane, working hand in hand with the contractors, was able to solve this difficult problem. The new, improved church entrance now includes an expanded front deck, stairway and a mobility ramp along with all the required handrails.



Bishop Susan Bell at the new entrance.

Although a lot of work has been undertaken and accomplished, there is still more to do. Planning and discussions are ongoing regarding the changes required to make the inside of the church fully accessible to people with mobility impairments. The main body of the church was built in multiple levels, which results in difficulties for some members to come to the altar and to transfer from the church to the community hall. The goal of having the church all on one level is ambitious. Being well over 125 years old, the foundations and wall structures require a great deal of planning and design before they can be modified. But, St. Luke's is determined that ALL people, no matter who they are or where they are on life's journey, are welcome here, and accessibility is one of the steps making that happen.

Meals that Make a Difference

Holy Trinity Community Events Fuel Outreach

LYN ADDARIO

This past fall, Holy Trinity Church in Fonhill hosted two wonderful community events, each blending food, fellowship, and outreach. Together, these gatherings helped support vulnerable neighbours in our region while bringing parishioners and guests together in meaningful ways. In October, a delicious lasagna dinner was held at Holy Trinity Church and hosted by the Italian Peasant Restaurant. Tickets were a sell-out with 100 people

in attendance, both parishioners and many guests. Attendees enjoyed the multi-layered homemade Italian pasta with a delicious tomato sauce and lots of cheesy goodness, heaps of salad with a choice of dressing and Italian bread. To top off the meal, a beautiful cake was served along with tea and coffee by the parishioners. We'd like to thank the DeVries Fruit Farm, which gave us a large discount on all our products purchased for the salads. The dinner was enjoyed by all, with part of the proceeds

donated to Pelham Cares. On November 9th, following our Remembrance Day service, the parishioners hosted a breakfast with song to raise awareness of homelessness in our community. We served 48 breakfasts that Sunday morning and raised \$360 for the Holy Trinity, Welland Volunteer Breakfast Program. A group of volunteers from our parish go every 3rd Monday of the month to help serve breakfast at Holy Trinity Church, Welland. Their program serves 90-100 breakfasts to people who are unhoused 365



Top: The Remembrance Day breakfast volunteers.

Photo: contributed by Paul Verroche

days a year. These two recent events at Holy Trinity highlight our parish's ongoing commitment to serving our neighbours both within Pelham and across the Niagara region. From raising

funds for Holy Trinity Welland's breakfast program to supporting Pelham Cares through a shared meal, our community continues to put faith into action through generosity, hospitality, and joyful gatherings.

Climate Justice Niagara

Parish Accreditation Program Gets a Gold Star

DEIRDRE PIKE

Over 25 Diocese of Niagara churches were represented at the annual Climate Justice Niagara (CJN) meeting for parish facilitators. The event drew over 40 participants in total to St. James in Dundas, on September 20.

A powerful opening from steering committee member Gary Bowron set the tone for the day, exemplifying the climate crisis we are facing but grounding us in prayer, and in the Indigenous practice of honouring the Four Directions. Gary is a parishioner at St. David's, Welland.

CJN steering member and the



original chair of the group, Sue Carson, presented the renewed Parish Accreditation Program, along with the current chair, Bruce Mackenzie. Sue is a long-time parishioner at St. James, and Bruce is a member and the administrator at St. George's, Guelph.

The Accreditation Program, is designed to assist parishes in

achieving climate-oriented goals by managing 15 different areas connected to parish life. Each of the areas has bronze, silver, and gold levels of achievement.

The first goal is connected to the Niagara Home Challenge, a survey which parishioners have been asked to complete. It has questions about the ways in which we care for creation

at home. If 80% of parishioners have completed the survey, a parish receives a gold-level credit.

The second goal is simply ensuring every parish has a Climate Justice Facilitator. Lighting, water use, maintenance, waste management, vehicle use, heating and cooling, and hands-free worship are just some of the other areas in which a parish can work to achieve a gold-level standing.

Following the review of this new diocesan program, a guest speaker from Environmental Defence Canada (EDC) provided a great overview of how we can become better climate justice advocates by lobbying elected

officials and participating in global campaigns and marches.

Hasanika Mediwake, Senior Engagement Coordinator from EDC, encouraged participants to set up visits to local MPs and MPPs to make our voices heard. There are many active campaigns on which to take action, including #Stopthe413 and ending gas plants in Ontario.

Finally, the day wrapped up with an opportunity for Climate Justice Parish Facilitators to hear from the committee and discuss among themselves, the best way to fulfill their roles, ensuring parishes are taking action to fight the climate crisis.

The Blue Machine at St. Jude's

HAMISH GUTHRIE

Our Greening Committee at St. Jude's Oakville is looking at water and the influence of the oceans as a second focus, in addition to our parish energy audit. For this study, after considering two other influential books, *Why I am a Climate Optimist* by Chris Turner and *Fire Weather* by John Vaillant, we chose *The Blue Machine* by Helen Czerski. In a talk to St. Jude's, I aimed to increase our knowledge of the oceans and to persuade climate skeptics to reconsider.

For me, concern for climate begins with two ideas: awe at the world's beauty, and concern to protect it. My feelings begin with scripture, in passages like the lines in Psalm 8, "O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth." Psalm 23 "... He maketh me to lie down in green pastures. He leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul." These lines evoke the profound spiritual and psychological comfort and aesthetic pleasure that emanate from the green world. There is also water's association with baptism, purification and the fruitfulness of "living water."

Many notes in *The Blue Machine* deepened my appreciation of the sea, and concern to protect it. We think of oceans as huge and invulnerable, but Czerski reminds us that if we imagine the earth as a huge inflated balloon, the oceans

would be no more than its cellophane skin. Sea creatures vary in size from whales to single-cell beings. Some of the smallest are most important. Take the single-cell diatom, which "generate[s] a huge proportion of the Earth's oxygen." The Earth's largest waterfall occurs underwater between Greenland and Iceland, where Arctic water pours over an underwater cliff into one of the ocean's deepest bowls.

Hawaiian canoeists wanted to rediscover how ancient canoeists, without GPS or any technology, sailed 2,600 miles from Hawaii to Tahiti. They thought such navigation skills, studying the stars, the currents and the clouds, had been lost. Then Mau Piailug turned up. He thought he remembered enough to try it. In May 1976, he and his crew, to enormous celebration, completed the crossing. Since then, that long paddle has been done repeatedly.

Oceans are warming. How do we know? By accident, it was discovered that the sound of an explosion can circumnavigate the whole world underwater.



Image: Unsplash/Elena Mozhvilo

Sound travels much more efficiently underwater than it does in air. Sound travels faster in warmer water. Sound's faster travel in the seas proves the seas have warmed.

What is the state of the oceans today? How does this affect us? We now know more than ever about the oceans. One significance is, of course, that all our drinking water comes from the sea, recycled as rain. A major issue is that the oceans absorb the sun's light and energy and thus moderate Earth's temperature. But oceans are warming. And warmer oceans are producing more and more destructive hurricanes.

The warmer seas are changing. They force fish that feed millions to change their water habitats. Czerski tells us that over-fishing has decreased the number of sea creatures to 60% of what it was. The seas are filling with discarded plastic.

The declining state of the seas exhorts our love and concern for them to action. Czerski's message is perhaps best stated by the people she quotes. Rusty Schweickart, crew member on Apollo 9: "We are not passengers on Spaceship Earth. We are the crew." Or, as the indigenous people of Hawaii put it, "A canoe is an island and an island is a canoe."

Hamish Guthrie is chairperson of St. Jude's Greening Committee

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Building a Just Economy:

Niagara’s Ongoing Commitment to Income Security

DEIRDRE PIKE

For more than a decade, the Diocese of Niagara has affirmed a simple, Gospel-shaped conviction: every person deserves the dignity of economic security. That belief has guided us as we have spoken publicly, advocated nationally, and made concrete decisions about how we treat the people who work within and alongside our Church.

Long before “living wage” language entered the mainstream, Niagara was already practising it. Over ten years ago, the Diocese of Niagara became a certified Living Wage Employer, recognizing early that paying people fairly is an act of discipleship: one that honours the God-given dignity of workers, strengthens families, and builds healthier communities.

Today, more than 500 organizations across Ontario have followed that example. But Niagara’s leadership has been steady and unwavering. Each year, we’ve adjusted our pay scales in accordance with the regional living wage calculations, acknowledging that the cost of participating fully in the community varies in Hamilton, Niagara, Halton, Wellington, Haldimand, and beyond. The recent update from the Ontario Living Wage Network (which calculates the 2025 living wage rates across Ontario) shows real

pressure on households and the urgency of this work.

In my capacity as Justice and Outreach Program Consultant, I was honoured to serve as a guest panellist on a webinar hosted by the Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction and the Ontario Living Wage Network, in which we explored how faith-based employers, community organizations, and local governments can come together to lift wages and strengthen economic security. This kind of engagement is part of our lived commitment to justice in the diocese.

And now, we are inviting every parish in the diocese to stand proudly in that same commitment. Many are already doing so. Others are discerning how to take the next step. To each community, we say: thank you. Thank you for caring for staff in ways that are just, transparent, and compassionate.

But our work does not stop at our own payrolls.

Niagara has also been a vocal champion of Basic Income, a national, unconditional income floor ensuring that everyone can meet their basic needs. This commitment is rooted in our understanding that poverty is not inevitable. It is the result of policy choices, and faith communities have a responsibility to advocate for a social architecture that lifts people up rather than leaving them behind.

In 2019, Bishop Susan Bell joined 50 Anglican and Lutheran bishops across Canada in signing a landmark open letter to the federal government urging the adoption of a Guaranteed Basic Income.

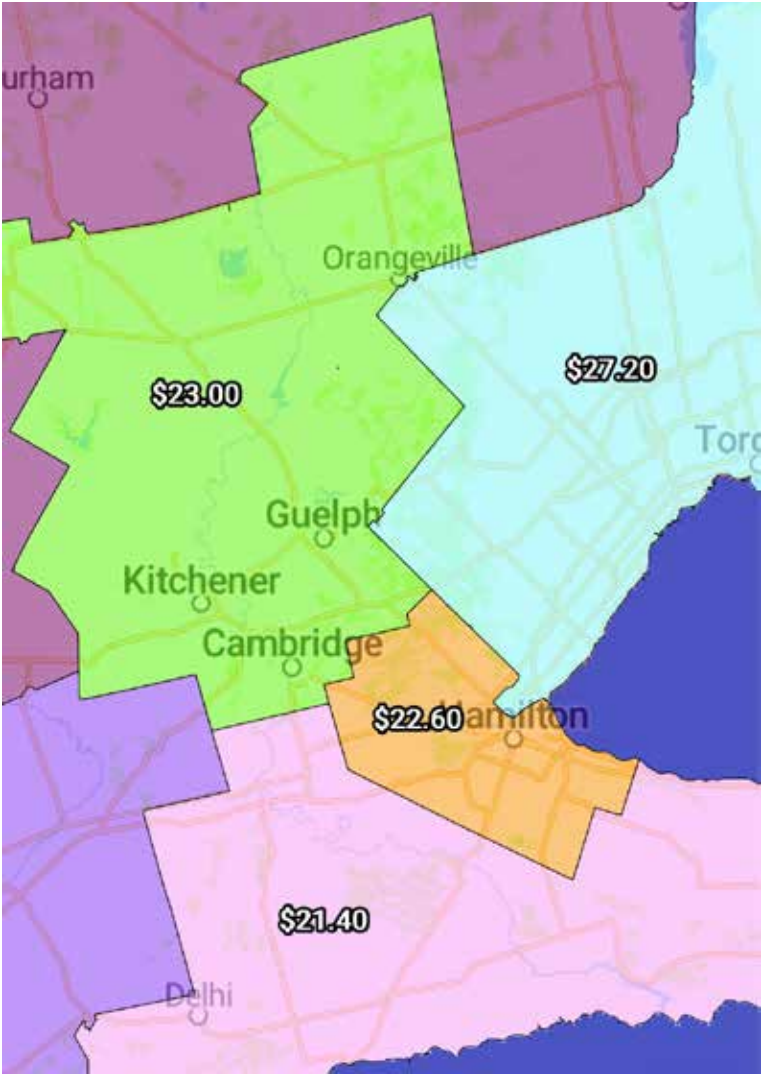
Currently, I serve as co-chair of the National Basic Income Forum Committee. We will be hosting a session featuring Kim Pate, Senator and sponsor of Bill S 206, an act to develop a national framework for a guaranteed livable basic income. This legislation signals a major step in translating our morally-informed advocacy into concrete national frameworks.

That spirit of moral leadership continues to propel us forward. The message remains the same: a strong, stable, compassionate Canada requires income security for all.

As Anglicans, we are called to love our neighbours not only in personal generosity but in public witness. We have a long and proud history in Niagara of doing both. Today, the economic pressures facing households, from food costs to housing to caregiving, make the work of income justice more urgent than ever.

So, this is both a celebration and an invitation:

- To parishes already paying a living wage: thank you for modelling the kingdom of God in action.



Graphic showing the living wage level in the regions included in the diocese.
Image: contributed by Deirdre Pike

- To those discerning the next steps: be encouraged. This work is faithful, possible, and transformative.
- To all people of the diocese: continue raising your voice for policies that honour human dignity, including a Guaranteed Livable Basic

Income.
Through advocacy, stewardship, and courageous generosity, we can build a diocese, a province, and a country where everyone has enough to participate fully in all that their communities have to offer.

Music, Community, and Fun

How A Children’s Choir Connects Kids To Faith

EMMA REILLY MCKAY

Every Thursday evening from September to May, a dedicated team of volunteers gathers to provide a one-of-a-kind ministry at St. John the Evangelist in Hamilton.

Chairs are set up; posters of music and prayers are hung on the walls; and stickers and a special snack are arranged for the children to take home. Soon, the children arrive, ranging in age from four to 12, each one wearing the red T-shirt featuring the slogan “My Soul Sings” that acts as the choir’s uniform. For the next 45 minutes, the children sing, laugh, learn, play, and grow

—all at no cost to them.

The St. John’s Children’s Choir is truly a community-based choir. It offers free choral training to everyone in our community, using music to teach children about faith. Currently, the choir draws children from three different faith traditions, as well as families without church connections. Anyone, regardless of musical education or faith background, is welcome.

The choir is directed by Susan McKay, a lifelong parishioner at St. John’s and a retired elementary school music teacher. Under Susan’s direction, the children sing a variety of styles of music, as well as receive training in

theory, ear training, solfege, and performance skills. Several times a year, the children are invited to share their music at the Sunday service. The children also perform in “mini concerts” held throughout the year, offered during the regular Thursday rehearsal time—ensuring that time and travel commitments are kept to a minimum for busy families.

The impact of this ministry is profound. Recently, a seven-year-old chorister named Andy created a poster to help publicize the choir that captures how much the children value their choir experience. The poster shared various aspects of the



Detail from the poster for the St. John’s Children’s Choir by choir member Andy.
Photo: Susan McKay

choir routine: The Chorister’s Prayer, the Evening Collect, the choir performing, and the choir selling cookies and lemonade at our annual fundraiser. Andy, who took on this project completely on his own initiative, proudly shared that his poster took three hours to make. His pride in his work, both at choir and in his art project, is a testament to the deep connection that both the

children and volunteers have to this ministry.
As to the listeners, not only are their hearts touched by the children singing, but the choir see the impact of their music through the smiles and—yes, sometimes—tears of their audience.
The St. John’s Children’s Choir is happy to accept new members each January and September — no audition necessary.

If you have any questions, please direct them to Susan McKay at smckay0424@cogeco.ca. Additional information is available at our website rockonlocke.ca under Worship.

Play Without Ceasing

CYFM Leaders Gather for a Day of Joy, Rest, and Renewal

SARAH BIRD

On Saturday, November 8, Children, Youth, and Family Ministry (CYFM) leaders from across the Diocese gathered at St. John's Anglican Church in Ancaster for what many described as one of the most refreshing and uplifting retreats they had ever attended. Offered each year as a gesture of gratitude to those who minister with families and young people, this year's retreat, Play Without Ceasing, beautifully wove together laughter, stillness, storytelling, spiritual practice, and shared meals in a way that felt both deeply pastoral and joyfully energizing.

The retreat was led by the Reverend Monica Romig Green, whose background in improvisational play and spiritual formation shaped every aspect of the day. Her thoughtfully prepared materials, rooted in a theology of attentiveness, acceptance, collaboration, and sacred storytelling, invited participants into a gentle rhythm of playful engagement and reflective prayer. Green's leadership balanced creativity and humour with pastoral sensitivity and theological depth, creating an experience that was both restorative and transformative.

The parish hall was arranged to welcome participants into comfort and ease: a bright gathering space, dining tables draped in linens, cozy breakout rooms, and a hallway softened with pillows, camp blankets, and windows overlooking the colourful fall landscape of historic Ancaster. Leaders were encouraged to take the day as they needed, resting quietly, stepping outside, connecting with colleagues, or immersing themselves in the improvisational activities. A generous hospitality table offered fresh fruit, vegetables, snacks, baked treats, coffee, tea, and sparkling water throughout the day. Two delicious meals and a relaxed social hour with wine further expressed the gratitude held for these leaders and their ministry. Great care went into preparing the day, right down to a car packed to the brim with supplies (and even a toaster oven!), ensuring that nothing was overlooked and that everything needed for the full ten-hour day



Great care went into preparing the day, right down to a car packed to the brim with supplies (and even a toaster oven!), ensuring that nothing was overlooked.

was on hand.

Throughout the retreat, participants embraced the opportunity to care for their own spirits. One person found a quiet spot and drifted into a much-needed nap. Others journaled, coloured mandalas, created prayer beads, explored finger labyrinths, or settled into moments of deep, silent reflection. "I didn't realize how much I needed this," one attendee shared. Another reflected on how freeing it felt to be in a room of adults without needing to supervise or plan for others: "It's rare to have space to learn and play without being in charge."

The retreat's theme, Play Without Ceasing, invited leaders to explore improvisational play not as performance but as a spiritual practice grounded in attentiveness, trust, and community. Monica guided groups through imaginative games drawn from European improvisational theatre traditions, introducing concepts such as noticing "offers," embracing mistakes, accepting and endowing what is given, and allowing creativity to unfold collaboratively, ideas echoed throughout the retreat handbook.

What began as light-hearted fun soon opened into meaningful reflections on ministry and faith. Participants recognized how improv nurtures presence, active listening, and a willingness to trust the unexpected, skills that serve CYFM ministry well in an ever-changing world.

Periods of silence using guided reflection questions invited participants to consider themes of safety in God, receiving and offering grace, discerning invitations from the Spirit, and

noticing God's presence in the unfolding stories of their lives. Monica encouraged leaders to reflect on their own journeys of faith, where God appears as a central character and how God might describe the "next chapter" of their spiritual lives. Many of these exercises, drawn from the retreat handout, framed storytelling as a sacred and communal practice that strengthens the Church.

Beyond the rich program content, the retreat provided a rare chance for CYFM leaders, some newly stepping into ministry, others long seasoned, to connect deeply with one another. Conversations throughout the day explored the joys and challenges of family ministry, the evolving experiences of young people in our communities, and the shared longing for creativity, imagination, and collective wisdom.

One participant expressed how refreshing it was to share openly with colleagues who "get it", those who know the pressures, the tender moments, and the sacred work of walking alongside children and families in faith.

The retreat concluded with a Eucharist that brought the day's themes together in worship. Monica presided, drawing on gifts of play, acceptance, creativity, sacred storytelling, and God's ever-present invitations. The participatory liturgy gathered the essence of the day, offering a worship experience that was joyful, grounded, and deeply moving.

On behalf of the Diocese, heartfelt thanks go to all who participated, St. John's Ancaster for hosting us, and most especially to the Reverend Monica



Retreat leader the Reverend Monica Romig Green also presided at the Eucharist.




Participants ham it up for the camera.

Photo: Sarah Bird

Romig Green for her insightful and spiritually grounded leadership. As CYFM ministry continues to evolve, gatherings like this remain essential: creating space for leaders to reconnect with God, with one another, and with the joy and playfulness at the heart of Christian life.

May we all learn to "play without ceasing," trusting that through openness, collaboration, and attentiveness, we participate in God's unfolding story of love for the world.

Sarah Bird is missional formation coordinator for the Diocese of Niagara



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Viewing 2026 Through a Different Lens

**THE REVEREND STEWART
CAROLAN-EVANS**

January is a natural moment for looking ahead. As the year turns, we pause between what has been and what might be. We look forward, but never from a blank slate. Our hopes, fears, and expectations are shaped by our experience. The question is not whether we look to the future through a lens, but which lens we choose. This choice echoes a deeper truth found in one of the great stories of the last two centuries: *Les Misérables*. Many of us have seen the stage musical, based on Victor Hugo’s classic tale of post-revolutionary France. At its heart stand two unforgettable characters, Jean Valjean and Inspector Javert, whose contrast offers a striking reflection for the start of a new year.

Jean Valjean begins imprisoned, four years for stealing bread to feed a starving child, and fourteen more for trying to escape. His sentence unfolds under the relentless gaze of Javert, whose life is ruled by a rigid sense of justice. On release, Valjean, destitute and desperate, steals silver from a priest who has welcomed him, and when caught, he expects to be returned to prison. Instead, the priest forgives him and even gives him his cherished candlesticks. To the hardened Valjean, shaped by years of cruelty, this act of mercy

is bewildering. It becomes the moment that changes everything. He breaks parole, changes his identity, works hard, and eventually becomes a respected mayor and factory owner. But his life never becomes a tidy ascent. The future, for Valjean, is never predictable. Time and again, he chooses the path of love and sacrifice over safety and advantage. He reveals his identity to save an innocent man. He spares the life of his relentless pursuer, Javert. And he risks his own life to save the young revolutionary who will capture his adopted daughter’s heart. Valjean faces the world as it unpredictably unfolds, he looks ahead through a lens shaped by faith, mercy, and love, a lens that expects mystery and welcomes it.

Javert, by contrast, is unwavering. His decisions flow from strict logic. Justice, as he understands it, is a straight line: clear, constant, and unsentimental. One of his memorable songs in the musical shows Javert looking across the city at night, comparing the moral order he trusts to the fixed stars above. He sings of certainty: “He [Valjean] knows his way is dark, but mine is the way of the Lord... Stars, filling the darkness with order and light, you know your place in the sky, you hold your course and your aim.” For Javert, life holds no mystery, only rules. He

is convinced Valjean can never be trusted or changed. His whole future is mapped out by the certainty of his own judgment.

Our modern world often resembles Javert’s confidence. We are told that the mysteries of life are all being solved and the remaining unknowns are simply problems awaiting better logic, data, and technology. The past is catalogued; the present is measurable. The future will be manageable if we can just calculate it correctly. In this view, the world becomes a place to control rather than a mystery to enter.

But *Les Misérables* pushes back. Javert cannot understand Valjean’s compassion. It doesn’t fit the neat lens through which he views the world. Yet he recognizes something undeniably good in Valjean. In one of the most haunting moments, Javert sings: “Can this man be believed? Can his sins be forgiven? Shall his crimes be reprieved? And must I now begin to doubt, who never doubted all these years?” In that moment, he encounters mystery, not as a threat but as grace, and his certainties collapse. The stars, he says, are “black and cold.”

At the beginning of a new year, most of us feel the tension between the Valjean and Javert ways of seeing. So, it is worth asking ourselves: through which lens am I looking? The Valjean lens that hopes, forgives, and

believes renewal is possible or the Javert lens that longs for control, clarity, and a predictable future. *Les Misérables*, like the Gospels, reminds us that life is not a puzzle to be solved nor yet a set of certainties to be defended. Mystery and mercy weave through our days in ways we cannot fully explain, yet they remain real all the same.

At the end of the story, both men die. Javert is swallowed by

the darkness he cannot reconcile. Valjean, by contrast, dies in the arms of his beloved daughter. The musical closes with a vision of hope: those who have fallen in the struggle for freedom and justice stand on a great barricade, a clean and beautiful Paris at their feet. Wounds are healed, songs of peace rise, and heaven’s light is warm and generous. In that place, there is no tension, no muskets, and no Javert.



Photo: Unsplash/Chandan Chaurasia

Niagara Anglican Deadlines and Submission Guidelines

Upcoming Deadlines:

- March – January 19
- April – February 13
- May – March 16

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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Planning with Purpose

Getting Your Legacy Program Off on the Right Foot in 2026

MICHELLE HAUSER

As vestry season unfolds, many parish councils and stewardship committees are taking stock of the year behind them and planning faithfully for what lies ahead. For some, this is the moment when a familiar refrain is heard: “We should really do more about legacy giving.”

It’s an area of stewardship that many churches aspire to strengthen but rarely find the right moment—or the right tools—to begin. Resources from secular charities don’t always translate to a faith-based context, and conversations about wills and bequests can feel awkward or out of place in the life of a congregation.

“We often hear from parishes that they want to start the conversation about legacy giving, but they’re not sure how,” says Michelle Hauser, Development & Communications Officer for the Anglican Foundation of Canada (AFC). “That’s exactly why we created the *Legacy Talk Parish Toolkit*—to make it easier, more

natural, and more spiritually grounded.”

Rather than focusing on financial targets, *Legacy Talk* connects legacy giving to gratitude, discipleship, and hope for the future of the Church. Each seasonal toolkit aligns with the rhythms of the liturgical year, offering clergy and lay leaders reflections, bulletin inserts, sample messages, and practical templates that can be adapted to any parish setting.

Begin with Vestry Season: Planning with Purpose

Annual Vestry Reports and planning meetings provide a perfect opportunity to integrate legacy giving into the parish’s financial and spiritual vision.

For example, the Vestry Season toolkit offers a Parish Council Checklist—simple, concrete steps that can help normalize legacy giving as part of a parish’s ongoing stewardship practice: Add legacy giving as a standing item in stewardship conversations; Include a legacy paragraph in the vestry report.



Ensure your website or bulletin mentions bequest options; Publicly thank legacy donors when appropriate.

“For many churches, the checklist is a great place to start—it helps parishes move from ‘we should do something’ to actually feeling confident about making legacy giving part of their spiritual DNA.”

From Lent to Christmas: A Year of Gratitude, Growth, and Faith

Across the seasons of the

Church year, *Legacy Talk* offers practical ways to weave legacy giving into parish life—always grounded in faith rather than fundraising.

During Lent, parishes are invited to reflect on what they treasure and why, exploring legacy giving as a spiritual practice rooted in love and intention.

The Easter to Pentecost toolkit celebrates growth and gratitude, encouraging churches to see legacy gifts as seeds of faith—planted today to bless the

Church of tomorrow.

In Ordinary Time, the focus shifts to steady, everyday stewardship through simple reflections and conversation tools that keep faith communities engaged year-round.

As All Saints’ approaches, parishes are encouraged to remember, honour, and plan—giving thanks for those whose generosity built the Church we inherit and asking, “What legacy will we leave?”

Finally, Advent and Christmas offer a natural moment to express gratitude and hope, reminding us that every generation helps “prepare a place” for those who will follow.

“It is our hope that using *Legacy Talk* as a guide will help parishes build a rhythm of gratitude and generosity,” says Hauser, “and that 2026 will be the year more church communities feel inspired to take that next faithful step—turning good intentions into lasting impact.”

To explore or download the full series, visit anglicanfoundation.org/legacytalk.

St. George’s Anglican Church: Preserving a Living Landmark

SUE KINGSLEY

With nearly two centuries of history etched into its walls, St. George’s Anglican Church in St. Catharines stands as one of the oldest surviving Anglican churches in Ontario, still serving its original parish. It remains a living landmark—where the story of St. Catharines, and those who shaped it, still echoes today.

Three sides of the church are currently wrapped in scaffolding as a million-dollar restoration unfolds behind protective netting. The work addresses serious water damage and years of deterioration to the exterior stucco, masonry, and historic woodwork of the building, which first opened for worship in July 1840.

“One of the pillars of our church community is outreach,” says the Reverend Canon Tom Vaughan, co-rector of St. George’s Anglican Church, “and the walls that house our programs have been literally crumbling around us. This is the first major overhaul since a full renovation in 1972, and it’s needed now to

protect the structure and preserve our place of worship and our ability to help others.”

Located in the heart of downtown St. Catharines, St. George’s is a welcoming church with a dedicated congregation that opens its arms to neighbours in need—a safe space where people know they can turn. The church is a lifeline for many downtown residents, serving thousands each year with hot meals, family support, youth programs, pastoral care, and a deep commitment to justice and community care. Its Community Breakfast Program, which has provided a hot, nourishing meal every single morning—uninterrupted—for 30 years, offers steadfast hospitality and dignity to those who need it most.

St. George’s is also known for bringing people together through music and cultural events. With its stunning 140-pipe organ, dating back to 1912, and its rich acoustics, it has become a space for artistic expression and gathering. The church has hosted concerts,



Property manager Terry Colburn reviews the restoration work.

Photo: contributed by the Reverend Martha Tatarnic

recitals, and performances that build community through the universal language of music, and the choir of St. George’s plays a vibrant role in the city’s musical life, partnering regularly with musicians and choral performers from across Niagara and beyond. These musical offerings not only enrich the congregation but extend a cultural welcome to the broader region.

By 2024, it became clear that gradual damage caused by time and weather could no longer be solved with patchwork repairs.

After a diligent search, the church retained architectural consulting and heritage specialists ERA Architects Inc., and work began in January 2025.

At the same time, St. George’s launched a fundraising campaign with a daunting goal of \$450,000. The response has been extraordinary. As of this writing, nearly \$340,000 has been raised—thanks to parishioner donations, corporate support, and growing community fundraising efforts.

“At times it seemed like an

insurmountable amount of money,” says the Reverend Canon Martha Tatarnic, co-rector. “But every step of the way, we have seen a profound commitment to what this building makes possible, the history it represents and the faith that generations before have passed along to us today. With just over \$100,000 remaining to be raised, we are deeply grateful for the ongoing generosity that makes this possible.”

“What we are restoring is not only stone and stucco,” Canon Tatarnic continues, “but the beating heart of a community. When I look out at the congregation, I don’t only see the people in the pews—I see the generations who once sat where they sit now. In safeguarding this place, we are preserving their faith and their gifts and ensuring that our doors remain open to all who seek help, hope, and belonging in the heart of our city.”

To learn more about the restoration project, please visit <https://stgeorgesanglican.ca>