

## A New Diocesan Mission

Bishop designates St. Luke's in Hamilton as a mission.

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## The Grandparents Club

We chat with The Reverend Monica Romig Green about a new faith formation program for churches.

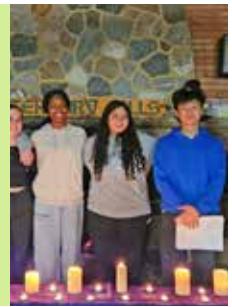
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## Calling All Young Leaders!

Applications now open for Youth Leadership Training Program.

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# NIAGARA ANGLICAN

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FEBRUARY 2026

# Bishop Susan's Lenten Book for 2026: *Rooted in Love*

Each year, the bishop invites the diocese to journey together through Lent by sharing a common book for prayer, reflection, and spiritual growth. For Lent 2026, Bishop Susan Bell has chosen *Rooted in Love: Lent Reflections on Life in Christ*, a timely and deeply resonant resource for individuals, small groups, and parish communities.

"Reading this book is not only a wonderful way for us as Anglicans across our communion to support Bishop Mullaly's forthcoming

installation as the first female Archbishop of Canterbury, but it also provides us with a meaningful Lenten discipline," said Bishop Bell. "By engaging with this book as disciples and as a whole church, we have a wonderful opportunity to live into our Mission Action Plan, by igniting and strengthening our faith."

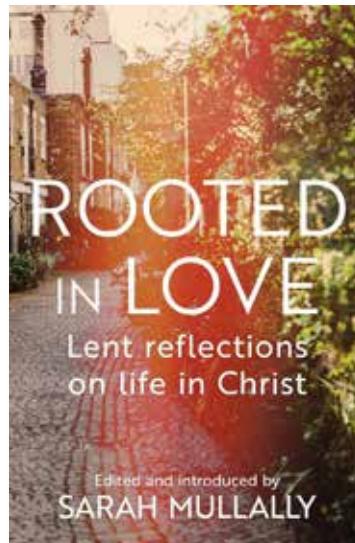
Written and edited by Bishop Sarah Mullally—who in October of 2025 was appointed the 106th Archbishop of Canterbury

—*Rooted in Love* offers forty

daily reflections that explore what it means to live a Christ-centred life. The book asks essential questions for Christian discipleship: Who is the Christ we serve? What does it mean to be part of the body of Christ? How are we called to live more fully in Christ today?

The choice of this book carries special significance. Bishop Mullally will be formally installed as Archbishop of Canterbury on March 25, 2026, during the Lenten season.

Reading her Lenten reflections



during this same period offers the diocese a meaningful way to pray alongside the wider Anglican Communion at a historic moment in its life.

"This book is a superb resource to deepen our life with Christ through daily Scripture, prayer and actionable steps offered by Bishop Sarah and the area bishops of the Diocese of London," said diocesan faith formation coordinator Monica Green.

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## Time for Spaciousness

THE REVEREND CANON STUART PIKE



Even the word sounds slow. In fact, the word means slow in French. It's Lent—the season when we spiritually prepare ourselves for the season of Easter. The problem is, even though it sounds slow, it seems that most people's lives don't really slow down during this season. Most people I see seem perpetually stuck on a hamster wheel revolving between the realms of work, family needs and social obligations that leave very little time for the stillness which might allow them the space to spiritually prepare. People seem hurried and harried and don't even want to think of adding some spiritual discipline into their lives.

I remember well when, as a theology student, there were times when it seemed the professors were colluding together to make sure that all our major papers were due in the same week. Those were the times when attendance at daily morning prayer in the chapel dropped in half. When talking to one of my theology friends about how utterly crammed my week was, and that I was thinking that I should drop Morning Prayer for a week too, he said something that I have never forgotten: "When there's no time to pray, it's time to pray."

Lent, in English, means something else as well. When something is lent, it means it has been borrowed. In order to add something to our schedule, we might need to bor-

row time from something else that we do. Or we might need to give something up to allow for this new thing. And so there is also a tradition of giving something up for Lent. Sometimes it seems that giving up something is the chief activity of many who observe Lent. Someone might give up chocolate, bless them, but if that is the total extent of their observance, I would suggest otherwise. They might try giving up some time from some small activity to really observe a spiritual discipline with a view to preparing their hearts.

What can you do? Whatever you choose to do, set your intention with a small prayer like, "Creator God, open my heart to receive the good news of Easter that I may be transformed to walk in your ways and to love what you love. Amen." Say this prayer each day before your practice.

If you take on a spiritual discipline, make it simple and something that you can reasonably do every day. Some examples are:

- Keep a gratitude journal: at the close of the day or first thing in the morning, review the last 24 hours and choose something that happened, or some person for whom you're grateful. Write it down in your journal. And say a quick prayer of thanks to God.

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# A New Year, A Newly Designated Diocesan Mission

As 2025 came to a close and the diocese marked the end of its 150th year, Bishop Susan Bell announced the mission designation of St. Luke's Mission, effective January 1st, 2026. This was the third initiative to earn this status in 2025 under Canon 4.9.

"This is a fitting way to conclude our 150th anniversary year as a diocese, and welcome a new year full of hope and possibility, trusting in God's daily provision," said Bishop Susan Bell. "St. Luke's Mission, led by the Spirit, builds on the Anglo-Catholic legacy of its forbears who worshiped at the church for generations."

The St. Luke's Community was established in 2019 under the leadership of then church-planting Rob Miller. The community began with millennial adults as a residential praying community in the north end of Hamilton. Rooted in the Anglican sacramental and Catholic traditions, the community has developed a consistent rhythm of worship and prayer, fostering a stable and engaged membership, shaped over time by its life as a praying community. This initiative also helped to form an ecumenical community of common prayer, which is now

a collaboration across the city.

The community grew from a group of disillusioned and over-extended Christians looking to reinvigorate their faith. Through Anglo-Catholic and mystical traditions, the group explores their faith through slow-paced liturgy and a deeply sacramental rhythm of morning and evening prayer.

The simple, liturgical morning and evening prayers offer silence, scripture, and stillness, allowing individuals space away from the noisy world to reflect deeply on their encounters with God in their daily lives.

At the heart of life together at St. Luke's is the Sunday Eucharist. Rooted in the Anglican Catholic tradition, the worship engages the community, inviting all to the table to encounter the risen Christ. By inviting the community to engage in this deep sacramental act of remembrance, transformation and sending, members become signs of Christ's presence in the world.

Another core piece of the mission is the importance of building relationships with each other and God's creation. St. Luke lives out its Christian mission through hospitality, art events,



The Reverend Rob Miller sits among members of the community in reflection during a celebration of the Eucharist.

Photos: contributed by StLuke's Mission



Gathering at a local pub builds connection with each other and the community.

storytelling over shared meals at community potlucks and weekly meals at Fisher's, a local pub, building relationships with each other and their neighbours. Spaces of solidarity, healing, and contemplative witness are offered through prayer shrines and vigils during times of grief

or crisis. "With this community, we've really taken care of each other in a special way," says Holly Campbell Gale, volunteer at the mission. "Several of us have gone through a really difficult last year with loss and with struggles within our families, and we've really shown up for one another."

Focusing on creation, the community has cultivated land behind the church, creating a community garden to serve as a central space for community life, food and collaboration. Prayer events mark the change of seasons, and St. Luke's gathers for community work days where they share in the care of the community garden, the property, and the building, fostering a life of shared responsibility.

Guided by the Spirit, what had recently become an empty church on John Street in Hamilton, St. Luke's found a renewed vitality through sustained missional development. The community has grown to 30 people bearing witness to Christ's presence in our world.

As a designated diocesan mission, an advisory board has been appointed by Synod Council to help support the work of the ordained missioner, the development of a Mission Action Plan with Bishop Susan, a missional mandate and new ministry goals and benchmarks. These goals will help the mission to also develop a long-term financial plan, ensuring it will stay a thriving missional community in North End Hamilton for years to come.

## Remembering Nicodemus

**THE REVEREND CANON DR. SHARYN HALL**

In the month of February, we think of Valentine's Day and hearts and flowers. February also has Flag Day, when we remember to honour our Canadian flag of a red maple leaf. The month of February is also designated Black History Month. I grew up in Amherstburg, Ontario, south of Windsor, which was an important exit point in the underground railroad for Black slaves escaping to Canada. Amherstburg has a Black History Museum, which has displays of artifacts and maps of that important road to freedom.

I was interested to read that it has been said, enslaved people held Nicodemus of John's Gospel in particular esteem because he went to find Jesus by night. Black slaves were forbidden by their masters to gather for worship in the daytime when white folk went to church, so they

would meet secretly at night. They respected Nicodemus for risking condemnation, perhaps even punishment, to be with Jesus. It is interesting how differently people view the character of Nicodemus.

Nicodemus was a Pharisee, a member of the powerful Sanhedrin council, and a high-ranking member of Hebrew society. Some scriptural commentators see him as a cowardly figure who goes to Jesus by night because he is afraid of the Sanhedrin council. Others see him as representing the conservative hierarchy that cannot understand the teaching of Jesus and therefore oppose him. However, Nicodemus risked his position as a prominent religious leader to seek a greater understanding of God's will.

He was well educated in the Hebrew scriptures and the laws of the Hebrew religion, but his mind was not closed. He was humble enough to admit that

this holy man from Galilee named Jesus had something to teach him. Nicodemus approached Jesus with an open mind, a willing heart, and a spirit longing for a deeper understanding of God. The fact that he questions Jesus is not a mark against him, but a sign of his willingness to reconcile his traditional knowledge with the radical ideas of Jesus. Even when Jesus chastises him for not understanding the concept of being born in the Spirit, Nicodemus still searches for understanding.

In Nicodemus, we see the struggle between knowledge and faith. His thinking has been shaped by years of study and discussion of the scriptures. What Jesus is saying goes beyond traditional teaching to the mystery of faith that with God, all things are possible. This is dangerous ground for Nicodemus. Jesus is questioning the right of the Pharisees to determine God's will for the people. Most of the



Nicodemus Visiting Christ, by Henry Ossawa Tanner, 1899.

Image: Wikimedia Commons

Hebrew leaders considered Jesus a blasphemer who should be shunned and condemned.

Nicodemus goes by night to speak with Jesus privately. If that seems cowardly, consider that later Nicodemus stands up in the Sanhedrin Council to defend the right of Jesus to be heard. Once Jesus was condemned, there was little else Nicodemus could do. His respect for Jesus was shown when he assisted Joseph of Arimathea in burying the body of Jesus in the tomb. This was a very public act, which probably angered the other Hebrew leaders.

If we criticize Nicodemus for not saving Jesus, we forget the

fearful circumstances of the time. Before we condemn the Pharisees, we should remember that Christians have shunned, condemned and killed other Christians in the history of the Christian church. Sometimes we forget that Jesus was a radical teacher, constantly challenging people to rethink their religious traditions.

The season of Lent is a good time to remember the story of Nicodemus because we all need time to question our personal relationship with God and with the teaching of Jesus. As the scripture designated for Ash Wednesday reminds us, we should not practise our faith to be seen as righteous or better than others. Nicodemus recognized that searching for God in our lives may require the humility to listen to the wisdom of others.

# New Windows Dedicated at St. Luke's, Smithville

DAVE HUFFMAN

Recently, St. Luke's, Smithville, was honoured by a visit from Bishop Susan Bell. Of course, it is always a pleasure to have Bishop Susan take time out of her extremely busy schedule to visit with us. Our parishioners enjoy the opportunity to meet and chat with Bishop Susan on a one-to-one personal basis. However, this visit was more than just an opportunity to renew acquaintances. Reverend Eleanor Clitheroe extended an invitation to Bishop Susan to come to St. Luke's for the purpose of officiating at a dedication service for the newly installed stained-glass windows of our church.

It is easy to become complacent and accept things as they are. For St. Luke's, this was the case with our existing church windows. Many were in a sad state of repair, as can be seen in these pictures. Some were cracked, some had slipped down out of their frames, and one even had a hole in it. It wasn't until member Jim Wilson inquired about the possibility of dedicating a stained-glass window in memory of his late wife, Jenni, that the congregation took a serious, hard look at the condition of all the church windows. As you can imagine, the costs associated with having stained-glass designed, fabricated and installed are no small matter.

When our church leadership presented the parish with this challenge, they rose to the occasion. Various members stepped forward to undertake the costs of individual windows to be dedicated to the memory of loved ones, near and dear to them.

With the help of the diocese, a stained-glass artist was found. Sue Obata (Toronto) and her installation team, Satters



The drawing of the gable window.

Stained-Glass Studio (Nova Scotia), proved to be extremely talented, creative, and skilled in their craft. Nine windows were individually designed to satisfy the vision of the donors. The resultant change was remarkable and exceeded everyone's expectations.

Parishioners who participated in the window revitalization project were:

- Jim Wilson, in memory of the Wilson Family
- Reverend Eleanor Clitheroe, in memory of her mother Lois Clitheroe
- Organist Ken Durham, in memory of the Durham Family
- Barb & Rob Cosby, in recognition of their over 100-year Family Farm
- Cosby Family, in memory of Dave & Beverly Shoesmith
- Karen Tylee & Dave Gordon, in



Left: The artist's drawing of the new St. Margaret Clitherow window. Above: Stained glass artist Sue Obata at work on the new windows.

Image: contributed by St. Luke's

memory of the Tylee Family

- Doris Lampman, in memory of her husband Randy
- Jim & Judy Higginson in honour of their granddaughter, Brooklyn
- Kathy Cunningham, in memory of her mother, Janet Komaritsky

But the window project didn't stop there. For the dedication service, a full colour pamphlet was created that showcased each individual window. Along with a picture of the window, the personal design thoughts from the artist, Sue Obata and the donor of the window were included. This pamphlet was given as a gift to each member of the congregation to have as a keepsake.

Parish member Nancy Poole took the window project even further. She used the pictures of the stained-glass windows and created a 2026 calendar, which has been well-received and sold throughout the community.

One member of the parish, Peter Forsberg, commented that on a dark night, when an event is being held in the church with all the lights on, the warm, colourful glow radiating from the stained-glass windows makes him proud to be a member of St. Luke's Smithville.



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## Time for Spaciousness

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Transformation happens rapidly in this discipline because you quickly start to notice and appreciate blessings. It changes the way you see things.

- Start to practise one or several of the daily offices: Morning Prayer, Midday Prayer, Evening Prayer or Compline, perhaps. You may use the BAS or some other prayer book, such as *Pray Without Ceasing* from the Anglican Church of Canada, but now there are easier methods, such as apps for your phone. My favourite these days is from England, and you can follow along as it is prayed aloud, with parts of it beautifully sung. It is a free download, just search for Daily Prayer in your app store and install it on your phone or tablet. It just says "Daily Prayer" in white letters on a blue background, from the Church of England. Choose one of the offices that fits into your day.
- Practise Lectio Divina or Visio Divina, where you meditate upon a text or piece of scripture, or upon an image, such as sacred art, to help you change your focus and lead you into contemplation.

You can also do your own research online to find a spiritual practice for Lent. I encourage you to find something that is attainable for you, and one that inserts a new spaciousness, rather than one that just adds more to your to-do list. This Lent, add some slowness into your life.





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**CALLED TO LIFE  
COMPELLED TO LOVE**

# The Slow Process of Belonging



## THE REVEREND CANON MARTHA TATARNIC

I have never been a run club kind of person. I enjoy running by myself, and motivation is not a challenge for me. I don't need other people to keep myself accountable or to pass the time during some of the many kilometres I spend on foot each week. I started going to Corners Run Crew for other reasons. I liked what they stood for; I liked that they combine running with being a force for good in the community; I liked the idea of connecting with people outside of my regular social (church) circle.

I started going to the early Thursday morning run. It was not without anxiety and

discomfort. People were friendly enough. I could usually find someone to chat with in the minutes leading up to the leader's morning introduction and the start of the run. But lots of people were there with their friends and weren't exactly looking for someone else to drop in on their conversation. Social time always follows the run, but I usually feel pressed for time and slip off once the out-and-back loop is complete. Despite thinking the run group is a good and friendly thing, most Thursday mornings, I would fight the temptation of my familiar solo routine rather than attempting the awkward process of trying to fit in.

Some inner doggedness kept me going, though, and I started to feel a sense of accountability to one or two others in the group. Friendships formed; I realized that I had become a part of someone else's weekly routine, and they had become part of mine. The more that I went, the more that I found myself in easy and casual conversation with a variety of people. I liked that talking about running would



photo: Unsplash/Mina Rad

lead to talking about a lot of other things, too.

It won't surprise you that there's a metaphor for church here, although I don't have a lot of advice to offer as a result. The church motto 'you don't have to believe to belong' has found some currency around Church Land. Research suggests, and anecdotal evidence bears this out, that the youngest generations are less interested in sorting out the answers to all of life's most pressing questions and more concerned with a sense of community and purpose. I went to church as the lone teenager in my congregation, and that didn't bother me because I didn't need church to be my social circle and because I wanted to know the whys and wherefores of

Christian belief and of liturgical practice. I wanted to hear a meaningful exploration of the Bible's many mysteries. My kids and their cohort seem to be much more engaged with a commitment to community and how what we believe translates into how people get treated.

These are trends of which we should be aware. And more than that, we need attentiveness to what a high bar 'belonging' can actually be. We can say the most welcoming things, produce a great church product, and offer reassurance of inclusivity and acceptance at every turn. And also, the doggedness that it takes for someone to keep coming back long enough that they actually start to feel connected—for that connection to feel natural or even effortless—is something

to keep front of mind. It takes an exceptional combination of perseverance and kindness for a person to form a new habit and truly experience belonging.

I think of all of the things that drew me to that run club: I love running, enjoy people, and wanted to connect. And I think of how tempting it still can be, every Thursday, to do my own thing rather than going to run club.

I also think of what, and who, made the difference. There was a set of core values that the group articulates intentionally and continually, and that made me want to be part of something. There were those who adopted a posture suggesting they were open to talking. There were groups of friends who clearly enjoyed being together but also made a point of welcoming others. There was the act of running, of running with others, of that simple act of solidarity, slowly, so slowly, opening the door to friendship.

I am grateful that grace and luck kept me going long enough to start to find what I was seeking.

# Our Treasures and Us

## A Time for Reflection

### THE REVEREND DEACON RODERICK McDOWELL

When this article appears, it will be either at the end of the season of Epiphany or at the beginning of Lent. Lent is that time of year when reflection on our own journey is a critical part of the process.

However, for many of us, there is also a time when we have to begin the process of preparing to file our income tax return. True, we do not respond to a tax collector like St. Matthew was before his conversion, but we do have to at least get ready to complete our tax returns or gather the information for whoever will finally prepare our returns. This means, among other things, putting together receipts from our giving to the Church and other charities so that what we owe will be less. In order to claim the benefits of any of these gifts, we must have receipts in case the Canada Revenue Agency eventually asks

to see them.

It is time, I suggest, to examine exactly what we have done with our treasures. So, in addition to reviewing our receipts, we should also ask what will happen when we die.

Let's deal with our treasures as we go on this journey of life. What was the income we are reporting? What did we do with it to assist the church, charities, health care facilities or education? We can all give something. Recall the story in the gospel of the widow who gave all she could. I suggest it is the perfect time to sit down and prayerfully decide what you should give to the church and charities. It is a simple act to draw up a sheet of how much you can give, and to whom, obviously taking into account what your income is. This will assist all of us in carefully deciding how and when we should donate.

There is, however, something else we should consider. What

happens when we die? What will happen to what we have, and should we benefit our church or some charity that has made a difference?

There is only one way to do this: have a will and keep it current. If we die without a will, all provinces have passed laws that will arbitrarily divide our property among our surviving family. Without a will, there can be no gifts to the church or charities, but the spouse you left long ago may get a sizeable chunk.

So you need a will. When I was in law school, one of my professors told us to tell future clients simply to do their own will or hire a non-lawyer to

prepare it for them. The reason this professor said this was simple. Some lawyers will make more money clearing up an estate than preparing a will.

You may complain about the cost. The cost will vary depending on the size and complexity of your estate. It will be money well spent. It will also be important to regularly update the will.

Let me share some stories. Recently, the superior court in Nova Scotia heard a case involving a large bequest by a widow to "Anglican parish A". By the time the woman died, parish A no longer existed. Parish A had merged with another "Anglican parish B", but the will had not



been changed. Fortunately, the trustees and the lawyers they hired convinced the judge that the widow wanted the gift to go to the new combined parish. Unfortunately, this procedure cost money and meant there was less for the parish.

Recently, a parish in this diocese received a gift of \$150,000 in a well-drafted will. The gift was to be used at the discretion of the wardens. Too often, bequests to churches can have awkward restrictions. This wise gift enabled the parish to sponsor a family of six from Afghanistan, replace all their aging windows, and still have a nice cushion for the future.

So please take some time to examine your resources. What can you donate now to the Church and some charities you wish to assist? Then consider what you want your will to say, and please consult a lawyer to make sure it will happen. These can be simple acts of kindness that will make a difference.



Photo: ingimage.com/Highway Starz

# A Place to Thrive:

## Faith, Partnership and the Completion of 412 Barton at St. Matt's

JANE ALLISON

When the doors opened at 412 Barton Street East on December 9, it marked far more than the completion of a building. It marked the fulfilment of a promise made by St. Matt's—one rooted in faith, sustained by community, and shaped by a shared belief that everyone deserves a safe, dignified place to call home.

After years of visioning, partnership and determination, St. Matt's has completed a 15-unit deeply affordable apartment building for Indigenous and racialized seniors experiencing homelessness. For many across the Diocese of Niagara who supported this project through funding, advocacy and awareness, 412 Barton stands as a tangible expression of what becomes possible when faith is paired with action.

From the outset, the project was guided by a commitment to truth, reconciliation and justice. St. Matt's has been clear that this work is an act of reconciliation—acknowledging that the land on which 412 Barton stands was originally stewarded by Indigenous peoples, and committing to build in ways that honour dignity, belonging and community for those who have been historically excluded.

### Built with Care, Speed and Purpose

412 Barton is an innovative modular construction project, designed to respond urgently and thoughtfully to Hamilton's housing crisis. Built off-site and assembled on location, the entire exterior structure was completed in less than three months—a remarkable achievement in today's construction environment. Pre-clad modular wood panels allowed the building to be constructed right to the lot line, maximizing space while respecting the surrounding neighbourhood.

Beyond speed, the building's performance exceeds expectations. The modular construction delivers energy performance approximately 25% better than Ontario Building Code requirements, ensuring long-term sustainability and lower operating costs—an important consideration for deeply afford-



Left: The completed 412 Barton building

Top: The opening ceremonies.

Above: Bishop Susan Bell addresses the opening ceremony.

Photos: contributed by St. Matt's

able housing.

Equally intentional were the materials and interior design choices. Floor panels and walls made from Canadian-sourced timber have been left exposed where possible, a decision shown to increase well-being and a sense of calm for residents. Each unit includes a full kitchen with modern appliances, including dishwashers, spacious bathrooms, high ceilings, and an abundance of natural light. Accessibility features are woven throughout, and shared resident spaces foster connection while respecting privacy.

### A Journey Marked by Community

The completion of 412 Barton builds on earlier moments of celebration and reflection. At the project's midpoint, partners gathered to sign the building walls—signatures that are now sealed within the structure itself, symbolizing a collective, enduring commitment to Indigenous and Black seniors in Hamilton.

Throughout the campaign, the message was consistent and heartfelt: home is a safe haven, a place to rest, a place to thrive.

That language resonated deeply with parish communities across the Diocese, many of whom responded with generosity, prayer and advocacy.

"The 412 Barton delivers deeply affordable housing during a crisis never seen before in Canada. We've been proud to work alongside the Afro-Canadian Caribbean Association and the Hamilton Regional Indian Centre alongside the Anglican Diocese of Niagara," says Renée Wetselaar, executive director of St. Matt's. "Building bridges is what we do and represents who we are."

St. Matt's board chair Melanee McAulay agrees. "Partnership is the key in supporting our racialized seniors," she says. "The Black and Indigenous community is under represented in the social justice arena, and these homes are a start in addressing this imbalance."

### Faith in Action

The opening ceremony reflected the spiritual grounding of the project, incorporating Land and Ancestors Acknowledgements, a fire pit,

and wording drawn from the Seven Generations and the Seven Principles of Kwanzaa. These elements underscored a central truth: housing is not merely shelter, but a foundation for healing, dignity and renewed possibility.

For the Anglican parishes who walked alongside this journey—through financial support, moral encouragement and community storytelling—412 Barton is a shared accomplishment. It stands as a testament to what faith communities can achieve when they listen deeply, act courageously and commit to long-term transformation.

"The Anglican Diocese is deeply grateful to have played a

role in helping bring this vision to life, grounded in justice, compassion, and reconciliation," said Bishop Susan Bell at the opening ceremony. "Creating a home is sacred work. It restores hope, stability and the truth that every human being is worthy of safety, care, and belonging."

As residents begin to settle into their new homes, the legacy of 412 Barton is already clear. This is not just a building completed, but hope made visible—a place where seniors who have endured far too much instability can finally rest, belong, and thrive.

Jane Allison is the donor relations and communications officer at St. Matt's

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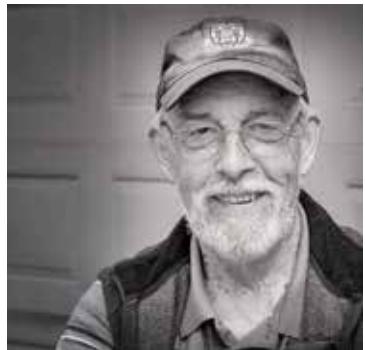
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## In other words

# Healthy Evangelism: What Does it Look Like? Part 3



**JOHN BOWEN**

Everybody is an evangelist. It's just human nature. Whenever we have good news, we share it, whether it's about a new movie, a cool restaurant, or a brilliant new novel. How else would we find out about worthwhile things if it were not for the enthusiastic recommendation of people we trust?

When it comes to the good news of Christian faith, there are lots of ways to share the good news with integrity and respect. We have looked at six of them already. Here are some more:

### 7. A special service

A couple of years ago, I happened to be in York, England, when there was a service in York Minster for the consecration of three new bishops. The Minster was full to overflowing, and it was a wonderful, uplifting service. Then, just before the blessing, Archbishop Stephen Cottrell, who was presiding, said something that was not part of the liturgy. It went something like this:

You may be here today, and you haven't been in church for a long time, or maybe you've

never been in church before. And during this service, perhaps you were surprisingly moved, or there was a feeling of joy, or of dissatisfaction, or of longing. I would encourage you to think that maybe that was Jesus tapping you on the shoulder, the Jesus who was the focus of this service today. And if you did feel something, I encourage you not to ignore it or shrug it off: come and speak to me or to someone else, and we would be delighted to help you.

So often, such big services do attract people who would not call themselves Christians, as family members or simply curious visitors, and often they do experience a nudge from the Holy Spirit—so why not tell people simply and without pressure what it means and what they can do about it? That's evangelism.

### 8. Special lectures

Last November, Hamilton residents were treated to "An Evening with Margaret Atwood," where the most famous living Canadian author was interviewed about her most recent book, *Book of Lives: A Memoir of Sorts*. Fifteen hundred people attended! When you have the right topic and the right speaker, people will show up.

On a much smaller scale, I have seen the same principle applied in church contexts. Sometimes it is a well-known politician talking about their faith, or a medal-winning athlete, or the head of a much-admired local charity. For some years,

hockey legend Paul Henderson (a faithful Anglican) was a popular speaker at such events.

For many people who are not ready to darken the door of a church on a Sunday, such events are interesting and easily accessible, especially when they are held in a public place, rather than in a church basement. Food also helps, whether breakfast, lunch, or supper: Jesus often shared the Gospel over food, so we have the perfect excuse.

### 9. The Jesus Deck

If you were at the Supercrawl on James Street North in Hamilton last September, you would have seen a line of people going into Christ's Church Cathedral. Among the things the visitors would see were three tables, each with a person sitting behind it shuffling a deck of cards, each card bearing the picture of a scene from the Gospels and an appropriate Bible verse. This is the Jesus Deck.

I was there, learning how to use the Jesus Deck. When someone expressed curiosity, I would say, "Well, each card shows a scene from Jesus' life, and the cards are a way to see how the story of your life intersects with

the story of Jesus' life. Might you be interested?" To my delight (and, I confess, surprise), most people said yes, so I would lay out perhaps five of the cards. I then invited the person to take time to look at the five and choose one that appealed to them.

One young woman picked the card showing Jesus' baptism. It turned out that she hated her job and was wondering whether to look for a new one. It was very natural then to say,

"Well, this picture is of a turning point in Jesus' life: he's finished his preparation, and God is affirming him as he begins his real life's work. Is it possible that God wants to affirm you, and guide you to a job which will use the gifts he's given you?" We then had a lovely discussion, and at the end, with her permission, I prayed for her. In a very direct way, the Jesus Deck gave her good news that precisely matched her situation. It was all relaxed and friendly—and yet powerful.

### 10. The simplest, most demanding witness

A couple of years ago, I undertook a study of why

people in Canada become Christians—because they still do! What would you guess was the number one influence? Friends. Friends who are already Christians. But not any old Christian friends. These friends had particular qualities: they patiently answered questions, they walked the Christian talk, and they were patient. My guess is that few of those Christian friends would self-identify as "evangelists"—and who can blame them? They were just being good friends, real-life evangelists, and a million miles from the caricature.

So that's it—ten forms of evangelism that are perfectly compatible with Anglican spirituality. Evangelism is a basic spiritual discipline, as much as prayer, or forgiveness, or social justice. In these days of church decline, it is a discipline we need urgently to recover—and not just for the sake of survival! The Gospel really is good news for the many people in our world who are lonely, confused, guilty, or hurting. We just need to pray, discern what form of evangelism is most appropriate for our context, pray (again), and then try. What's the worst that could happen?



The Jesus Deck comprises cards depicting the life of Jesus. They can be used to show how Jesus's life intersects with ours.

Photo: tathana.com

## Several Foundation Grants Awarded in 2025



Last year's granting by the Anglican Foundation of Canada reflects the breadth of the Anglican Foundation of Canada's longstanding partnership with the Diocese of Niagara: parish renewal through diverse infrastructure grants, leadership development through bursaries, ongoing community ministries, and legacy-designated support.

Among the grant recipients in 2025 were Holy Trinity, Fonthill; St. Stephen on-the-Mount, Hamilton; and St. George's, St. Catharines. Each received a grant, ranging from \$5 to \$15

thousand, to support a building project that supported their local ministries.

Since 2010, the Anglican Foundation of Canada has invested more than \$453,000 in Niagara through nearly 90 grant recipients, strengthening ministries across the diocese. The Foundation's endowment, faith-

fully stewarded by clergy and lay leaders from across Canada, has resulted in disbursements totalling \$40 million since its inception nearly 65 years ago.

The foundation derives its capacity to support the Anglican Church of Canada through the memberships of parishes and parishioners. At Synod in

2024, Executive Director Scott Brubacher invited all parishes to become members, thereby enhancing the Church's collective capacity to support ministry from coast to coast to coast. Check with your rector or priest-in-charge to determine if your parish is a current member.

The foundation not only supports diverse infrastructure projects, but also community ministries, leadership and education, Indigenous ministries, and sacred music and liturgical arts across the Canadian Church.

Each diocese is limited to

submitting two applications in any given grant cycle, and four in any given year. Grants endorsed by the Diocese of Niagara are typically Category B grants, where a maximum grant of \$15,000 can be applied for from the Foundation, provided 50% of project funding is in place.

*If you are interested in applying for an Anglican Foundation grant, please be in touch with Archdeacon Bill Mous at the earliest opportunity for details.*

# The Grandparents Club

## A New Faith Formation Resource for Churches

In January, the diocese released a new faith formation resource called *The Grandparents Club*. Available online and written by our Faith Formation Coordinator, the Reverend Monica Romig Green, the Grandparents Club has been designed to meet the spiritual and relational needs of members of any Anglican parish who are in their second half of life, particularly those who are grandparents, great grandparents, great aunts or uncles, or godparents, anyone who has a personal relationship with younger people that they care about. Many in this group have a long history of faithful service to the church and carry a deep longing for their children and grandchildren to share in the Christian faith.

We talked with Monica about this new resource to find out more about it and its creation.

### Monica, tell us about The Grandparents Club. What is it, and who might be interested in participating in it?

**MRG:** The Grandparents Club is a free small group resource intended to help Christians in the second half of life grow deeper in their spiritual relationship with God, particularly those



Photo: contributed by Monica Romig Green

who care about subsequent generations and want to grow in how to encourage younger people in their faith journeys. Additionally, by bringing together like-minded Christians to share and pray for one another and their families, the Grandparents Club can deepen relational connections between club members, too.

### What can people expect to experience if they join the Grandparents Club?

**MRG:** There are eight group meetings for which we have provided all the preparation materials and meeting outlines. Each

meeting covers a different faith formation topic appropriate to a grandparent's life stage, such as the importance of prayer, reviewing our spiritual stories, spiritual growth in the second half of life, leaving a spiritual legacy, and giving a blessing. Meetings also cover information about children and youth spirituality, as well as practices in how to engage in spiritual conversations with young people. Our hope is that by exploring these topics together over the course of the meetings, participants will engage more deeply in their own spiritual journey while also seeking to support the spiritual journeys of the young people in their lives.

### What led you to create the Grandparents Club? Are you a grandparent yourself?

**MRG:** I'm old enough to be a grandparent! A lot of my contemporaries are having grandkids or are just on the cusp of that experience. My husband and I were not blessed with kids, so we have no grandchildren of our own. However, in the course of our ministries, we have encountered a hunger in younger people to know and connect with older people who are not just faithful Christians but are actively engaging in their spiritual lives. I have found this to be true of young

adults, teenagers, and younger children. I was blessed to fill in as the chaplain at St. Mildred's-Lightbourn School for a year and found that the spirituality of the primary-school-aged kids was rich and alive, but also hungry for loving adults to help give it shape and a vocabulary. I studied and found that psychology backs up my experience: children are hardwired for spirituality, and they need adults to help encourage and cultivate it with them. Often, grandparents already have a loving connection with their grandchildren and just need encouragement and help to open that connection up to spiritual things.

Additionally, in my work as a spiritual director, I have studied how people grow in their faith over their lifetime. A lot of spiritual supports are designed for first-half-of-life concerns, like learning about your faith and how to practice it. The second half of life has different concerns, which usually include invitations for deepening one's spiritual connection with God, others, and creation. Our society needs these kinds of spiritual elders, people whose relationship with God is both grounded and alive, who are humbled by life's challenges and therefore can provide compassion and grace to others on the journey. I wanted to encourage folks in this life stage to journey even further into the heart of God and grow into this important role for themselves, their families, the churches, and their communities.

### If folks are interested in The Grandparents Club, what should they do?

They can find the resource on the diocesan website, where there are instructions for how to get started. Once they read those over, they can talk with their clergy and see if the Grandparents Club can begin in their parish. And if anyone has any questions, I welcome them to contact me directly at monica.green@niagaraanglican.ca. I pray this resource will be a blessing to all who engage with it!

## The Companions Program

### September 2026 – June 2027

**The residential Companions** program is an immersive opportunity to experience a contemporary monastic community rooted in the Benedictine tradition. It is open to women aged 21 and up regardless of Christian denomination.

Companions live, work, and pray alongside the sisters, learning from them but also sharing each companion's own gifts with the sisters and their ministries. They will:

- ↳ Learn to cultivate peaceful and creative ways of living in a diverse intentional community
- ↳ Appreciate silence and solitude as well as community and service for a healthy life
- ↳ Put down deep roots of spiritual intimacy with God and each other
- ↳ Develop a personal path to ongoing spiritual growth



Application start & end (both programs):  
January 1, 2026 – May 1, 2026



Cost:

**Residential Companions:** sugg. \$150/month.  
**Companions Online:** sugg. \$100/month.

If cost is a hindrance, assistance is available.

**O**pen to women of all Christian expressions, **Companions Online** is an opportunity to become "monastics in the world," living a Benedictine rhythm of prayer, work, study, and recreation. Online Companions learn to develop practices that support and nurture their spiritual life from the comfort of their homes.

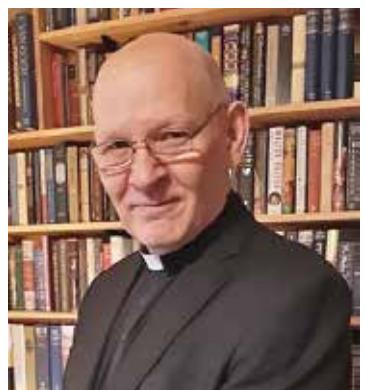
They meet regularly for classes and discussion groups, and commit to times of personal prayer at home. They share in book studies, participate in online worship and sometimes screen a film relevant to spiritual growth and self-understanding. Online Companions also develop spiritual disciplines that follow the liturgical year.

### To learn more about either program, or to apply, email:

Canon Sr. Elizabeth Rolfe-Thomas, SSJD, at  
companions@ssjd.ca, or phone St. John's Convent:  
416-226-2201, ext. 304

## The Sisterhood of St. John the Divine

# Every Day is Christmas: Finding Grace in the Midst of War



MICHAEL COREN

It's become fashionable in historical circles to revise or even doubt the 1914 "Christmas Truce," but the evidence for it happening is overwhelming. The First World War was five months old and would become much more brutal and cost millions of lives. Yet on this day, more than a century ago at Christmas, there was a spontaneous ceasefire along parts of the Western Front, and German and British soldiers met between the trenches in



Photo: Unsplash/National Library of Scotland

no man's land to sing carols, bury their dead, and even give their enemies gifts. Then, the following day, they returned to slaughtering one another.

It wasn't repeated, some of the troops involved were moved to other parts of the line, and senior officers and politicians weren't at all pleased. But for one brief moment, humanity broke through the macabre dance of death and destruction. Alfred Anderson was the last survivor of that miracle, only dying in 2005. As a very old man, he once said, "I'll give Christmas Day 1914 a brief thought, as I do every year. And I'll think about all my friends who never made it home. But it's too sad to think too much about it. Far too sad."

It is, as the great man had

it, far too sad. Tragic, in fact, that the Christmas of 1914 could not have become the norm, and smashed the grip of violence that would leave such devastation, agony, and loss. But while violence at Christmas is particularly jarring, there is, in reality, nothing uniquely pacific about it. War is always contrary to the Gospel message, and that's vital to remember as we prepare for and enter Lent.

Nobody can argue that after the entry into the world of God made man, we suddenly enjoyed peace and harmony. But then nobody can argue that we've genuinely and authentically lived according to the teachings of that messiah. As British author GK Chesterton said, "Christianity has not been tried and found wanting; it has been found difficult and left untried." He wrote that in a book entitled *What's Wrong with the World*, and the question is as pertinent

I grew up with someone who, when he left high school, joined the British armed forces, something he's always wanted to do. He must have been good at what he did because he was regularly promoted, joined a more elite regiment, and served in Northern Ireland, the Falklands, and goodness knows where else. Then he seemed to disappear from the lives of all of us who knew him. Nobody had any news of him, and emails and letters went unanswered. Then one day, in a rough street in an unfashionable town that I was merely passing through, I saw him. I shouted his name, assuming he'd look away or ignore me. Instead, a smile and open arms. I asked him why, what, and when?

"I was in the business of death, really," he said. "And the more of it that I saw, the more I realized the need for life, for a life fulfilled and one with meaning and purpose. I was abroad serving, it was Christmas, and I thought about that truce in 1914. Nothing like that here; we used Christmas Day as the time to engage the enemy. We won, I lost. Or at least it felt so."

He told me he'd left the army, found a Christian faith, had no computer or permanent home address, and simply travelled around the country working with people on the street, the hungry, the addicted. "You wouldn't believe how many of them are former military," he said, looking sad for the first time in our conversation. I asked him if he was happy. "Are you kidding? It's like every day is Christmas."

I've not seen him again, but I hear his voice every time I sit down to pray. "Every day is Christmas". It could be. No trees, gifts, or family dinners, but a world distended with joy, soaked in grace, where we regard everyone we see as precious and unique. The roaring into the world of the beatitudes, the perfect song that was the Sermon on the Mount. That's something to consider on the journey towards Easter. Be blessed this Lent, be full of grace, and be part of the great truce of God.

Back to the Christmas truce.

# Bishop's Lenten Book

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Originally published as a Lenten resource, *Rooted in Love* draws on the collective wisdom of the area bishops of the Diocese of London. Each day's reflection includes a Scripture reading, a prayer, and a practical action to help readers integrate faith into daily life. The structure makes it accessible for personal devotion while also lending itself well to group discussion and parish-based Lenten study.

As Emily Hill, the parish development missioner, notes, the book aligns closely with Bishop Susan's ongoing call for the diocese to keep Christ at the centre of all we do together. By reflecting on who Christ is and how we are called to live as his body in the world, *Rooted in Love* supports a shared diocesan focus on Christ-centred mission, prayer, and discipleship.

*Rooted in Love* has been warmly received across Christian traditions for its rich biblical insight, pastoral tone, and practical encouragement. It offers hope, guidance, and clarity for those seeking to draw closer to God during Lent and to carry those practices into life beyond the season.

The book is available for purchase through Indigo, Kindle, and Amazon.ca. Parishes and individuals are encouraged to consider using *Rooted in Love* as a shared Lenten resource in 2026, as we journey together in prayer, reflection, and renewed commitment to life in Christ.

"As we set about to observe a holy Lent, my prayer is that this year's Lenten book will help all of us grow closer to Jesus and live a more Christ-centred life," said Bishop Bell.

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# YLTP Registration Now Open Calling All Young Leaders of Niagara!

## THE YOUTH LEADERSHIP TRAINING PROGRAM

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"I ARRIVED AT YLTP WITH LITTLE LEADERSHIP KNOWLEDGE, AND I'M LEAVING THREE YEARS LATER WITH CONFIDENCE, SKILLS, AND LESSONS THAT HAVE SHAPED WHO I AM TODAY".

"YLTP HAS BEEN A DEFINING PART OF MY LIFE. IT PUSHED ME TO GROW, DEEPPENED MY FAITH, AND SURROUNDED ME WITH A COMMUNITY THAT BECAME LIKE FAMILY".

Reflections from last year's participants provide a glimpse into the lasting impact of the Youth Leadership Training Program (YLTP) on young people across the Diocese of Niagara.

YLTP gathers youth ages 12–15 for a four-day residential experience of leadership development, community building, and faith formation. Deeply shaped by our diocesan Mission Action Plan, the program equips young people to grow in faith, discover their gifts, and live out God's mission in their communities as Christ-centred, hope-filled, and missionally focused disciples.

Over the course of three consecutive March Breaks, participants are invited to explore where they fit in God's story, reflect on the qualities of leadership modelled by Jesus, and recognize the gifts they

already hold, as well as those they hope to develop. Through engaging speakers, small group discussions, creative prayer and worship, and hands-on justice-focused activities, youth are encouraged to step outside their comfort zones, practise compassion in action, and support one another as a community of emerging leaders.

Set against the beautiful backdrop of Canterbury Hills Camp, YLTP offers an inclusive and welcoming environment where youth can ask big questions, build lasting friendships, and experience God's presence in new and meaningful ways. If this opportunity resonates with you, or with a young person in your life, we encourage you to apply.

## YLTP 2026 Details

- **Dates:** March 15–18, 2026
- **Location:** Canterbury Hills Camp, Dundas
- **Application Deadline:** February 27, 2026
- **To Apply:** Contact Hannah Keller at [hannah.keller@niagaraanglican.ca](mailto:hannah.keller@niagaraanglican.ca)

## Volunteer with us

We are also welcoming adult volunteers to mentor and support these young leaders during YLTP 2026. If you feel called to serve, please reach out to learn more about how you can get involved.



Activities are all part of the fun and provide opportunities for personal growth.



2025 YLTP participants preparing to lead worship.

Photos: contributed by Sarah Bird

# Resurrection of Hope in Thundering Waters

## JOHN BACHER

When we sang "O Sacred Woods Now Wounded" at St. Barnabas Anglican Church, St. Catharines, the tune, although bravely expressing hope, was virtually a dirge of despair. The hymn following firm Anglican beliefs in the principles of the incarnation, fuses the pain of Jesus' suffering on the Cross, with the wounds inflicted upon the Earth from human sin.

With some trepidation, I journeyed to the Thundering Waters forest on my 70th birthday, on November 25, 2024. I had the good sense before embarking on this journey for the collection of seeds for the threatened wildflower, *Liatris Spicata* (Dense Blazing Star), to first attend a Morning Prayer service at St. George's Anglican Church, St. Catharines. The celebrant



Thundering Waters forest in Niagara Falls.

Photos: John Bacher

was the Reverend Michael Degan, then assistant curate of St. George's, now rector of St. James and St. Brendan in Port Colborne.

Degan spoke with me about the remarkable historical setting of St. George's church, which in the 1890s was in what was a Latin Quarter of scholars for the Niagara Region. Across from St. George's in what is now an apartment building were tenements which housed students of the St. Catharines Collegiate Institute, then located in what is now the Folk Arts Center.

Among those who journeyed a great distance from Fort Erie to the St. Catharines Collegiate was the future rescuer of Ontario from desertification, Edmund Zavitz. Degan told me he admired how Zavitz attended the Collegiate here as a mature student, since he has recurrent

nightmares of having to attend high school again as an adult.

I sought to harvest the seeds of the Dense Blazing Star to aid in the efforts of my friend and tenant, Woodard, to re-establish a meadow based on this wildflower at the Malcolmon-Eco Park. He is hoping to restore a Dense Blazing Star community established from seeds collected during an occupation of the site, which survived for several years.

The words of Psalm 24:1-6, read at Morning Prayer, were especially appropriate for my journey. It reads, "The earth is the Lord's and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it; for he founded it on the seas and established it on the waters. Who may ascend the mountain of the Lord? Who may stand in

Continued on PAGE 12

# Into the Desert with Christ

## Why Lent Still Matters in a Frantic and Fractured World

THE REVEREND CANON DR.  
IAN MOBSBY

Lent arrives every year like a quiet knock at the door. In a world marked by exhaustion, conflict, distraction, and the relentless pull of busyness, Lent offers a different rhythm. It is the season when the Church calls us to step aside from the noise, to slow the pace of our lives, and to remember our humanity. Rather than a burdensome obligation, Lent is a spacious gift: forty days of honest reflection, deepened prayer, spiritual re-centring, and renewed intimacy with God. At its heart is the simple but profound truth that God desires to meet us where we truly are—not where we pretend to be.

The origins of Lent stretch back to the earliest centuries of Christian life. Its shape is inspired by Jesus' own forty days in the wilderness, where he withdraws from everything familiar to face the deeper movements of his heart and to listen for the call of God the Father, the Creator. The Gospel of Mark tells it with stark simplicity: "The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him" (Mark 1:12–13). In Matthew and Luke, we hear more detail, but the essence remains: Jesus enters the desert to strip away distractions, to confront falsehood, and to realign himself with the heart and will of God. Lent is the Church's way of following him into that same inner terrain.

In the early Church, Lent was a time for people to prepare for baptism at Easter, and for the whole community to participate in their preparation through prayer, fasting, and acts of mercy. Today, Lent still invites us to prepare—only now the preparation is for a renewed encounter with the living Christ. Lent is not about self-punishment or spiritual heroics. It is about returning to what is essential. "Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful," the prophet Joel says (Joel 2:13). This is the tone of Lent: not fear, but return. Not shame, but honesty. Not despair, but hope.

Our post-secular world makes

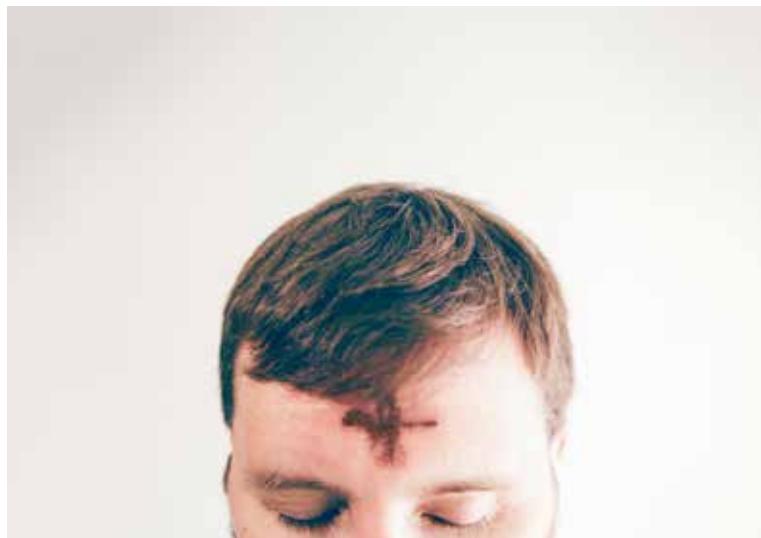


Photo: Unsplash/Megan Watson

such a return difficult. We live within layers of distraction that pull us away from the deeper questions that form the substance of spiritual life. The pace of our days leaves little room for stillness. Our culture encourages achievement, productivity, and constant motion, but leaves far less space to reflect on who we are beneath the surface. Lent interrupts that momentum. It asks us to pause and to ask: What has shaped me this year? What patterns of living limit my freedom in Christ? What resistances arise when I try to be still before God? What have I avoided facing within myself? These questions do not accuse us; rather, they invite us toward the healing and wholeness God desires for every one of God's children.

This is the gentle but necessary work of Lent: to face the internal blocks that keep us from going deeper with God. Every person carries such blocks. Some arise from fear—fear of being unmasked, fear of change, fear of letting go of familiar patterns. Some come from wounds and experiences that make trust difficult. Others come simply from habit, inertia, or the comfort of the known. Lent does not demand that we fix ourselves. Instead, it invites us to recognize these barriers and to place them, slowly and prayerfully, into the hands of Christ. The psalmist prays, "Search me, O God, and know my heart... and lead me in the way everlasting" (Psalm 139:23–24). This is the posture of Lent: the willingness to let God search us—not to expose us in judgment, but to bring us into freedom.

Jesus' own experience in the desert shows us what this can look like. In the wilderness, he

confronts the temptations that distort human desire: the temptation to rely on power, to grasp after recognition, to avoid vulnerability. These temptations still echo through the human heart today. Lent gives us space to examine where they surface in our own lives: the temptation to rely on our own strength rather than God's grace; the temptation to seek affirmation from others rather than resting in God's love; the temptation to avoid hard truths rather than allowing God to guide our transformation. When Jesus resists these temptations, he shows us what a life aligned with God looks like: grounded, humble, courageous, and free.

In a world overwhelmed by division, anxiety, injustice, and spiritual hunger, Lent feels more necessary than ever. We are constantly told who we should be, what we should fear, and what we must accomplish. The season of Lent reminds us that our identity is not earned but received. As St. Paul writes, "You are not your own... you were bought with a price" (1 Corinthians 6:19–20). Lent calls us back to the deepest truth of the faith: our lives belong to God, and God longs for our healing.

The practices of Lent—prayer, fasting, self-examination, generosity, simplicity—are not ends in themselves. They are tools to help us clear away the inner clutter so that we can hear the quiet voice of God again. They help us pay attention to the movements of our hearts, to recognize what is life-giving and what is not. Prayer in Lent need not be elaborate; it can simply be sitting in silence, offering God our undivided presence for a few minutes each day. Fasting is not about rigidity but about creat-

ing space. It can be fasting from food, from noise, from screens, or from habits that distract us from God. Generosity becomes a way to loosen the grip of self-centredness and to open our hearts to the needs of others.

Lent also reminds us that the Christian journey is not solitary. The whole Church enters this season together. We pray together, repent together, wait together, and look toward Easter together. Lent binds us to the Body of Christ in a profound way. In a time when many people feel disconnected—from community, from meaning, or from God—this communal dimension of Lent is an antidote to isolation. It whispers the truth that none of us walks this path alone.

The deeper purpose of Lent becomes clear when we remember where it leads. Lent is not an end. It is a journey toward

resurrection. Every moment of reflection, repentance, honesty, and surrender prepares us to experience the joy and freedom of Easter more fully. St. Paul captures this dynamic beautifully: "If we have died with him, we will also live with him" (2 Timothy 2:11). Lent invites us to set down whatever keeps us from life so that when the Easter light dawns, our hearts are ready to receive it.

In this fractured and frantic world, Lent offers the Church—and each of us individually—a chance to rediscover the quiet, steady, renewing presence of God. It calls us to enter the desert with Jesus, not to escape the world but to return to it with renewed clarity, compassion, and hope. Lent invites us to remember that the God who meets us in our weakness is the same God who leads us into new life.



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# St. Luke's Burlington at Work in Honduras

RICK REYCRAFT

For over 17 years, St. Luke's Burlington has been helping an Episcopal (Anglican) School for children in underserved communities in Honduras build a path out of poverty for the children and their families. This has been one of the major outreach projects of the church, not only because of the life-changing work the school does in Honduras but also because the involvement of parishioners has expanded their view of the world and their role in it. Hundreds of volunteers have been part of this.

The school, commonly referred to as El Hogar, is a project of the Episcopal Diocese of Honduras but is supported by individuals, churches, and service clubs all over North America. It has both an elementary school and a technical high school with about 250 students. Some students are day students, and some are residential if they do not live in the area or do not have a safe home environment.

St. Luke's has organized many fundraising projects in support of El Hogar, plus organized 13 one-week team trips to El Hogar over the years, with another planned for February 2026. In 2024, Bishop Mariann Budde from the national cathedral in Washington joined the St. Luke's team for the week to see how she and her diocese could be part of the El Hogar community. We have teamed up with several United Churches in the Toronto area to run joint fundraisers and form El Hogar Canada as a registered CRA charity.

In 2025, our team of volunteers has sold 400 chocolate Easter Eggs, 411 packages of chocolate bark, and 146 gingerbread house kits, all made by our volunteers. We have sold Honduran coffee, invited donations of old gold coins and jewelry. Many parishioners donate to our El Hogar fund or directly to El Hogar Canada.



The 2024 team at El Hogar.

Photos: contributed by Rick Reycraft

Why has this school in faraway Honduras captured the enthusiasm of St. Luke's when there are so many worthy local needs? St. Luke's strives to approach our outreach in a spirit of abundance, and we have many local outreach projects we are proud of. With all the attention immigration is getting these days, with people fleeing very challenging living conditions in impoverished countries, particularly in Central America, our church does its best to welcome immigrants, but it does not solve the basic problem. People need to believe they can build a good life in their home country. That is the focus of El Hogar, and the many inspiring examples of success keep us hooked. Our team trips focus on a cultural exchange, building an understanding of what life is like in the poor districts of Honduras, and how teachers, students, and parents are all working hard and effectively to build a better life for themselves and their country.

Recent Examples:

- Two girls came to El Hogar in grade 3 after struggling in the under-resourced and overcrowded public school. They could not read or write. By grade 5, they were caught up and doing very well thanks to the extra attention of their teachers. Not surprisingly, they

both decided they wanted to be teachers. One had a dream one night that they had started a school like El Hogar. She told her friend, who said, "Let's do it". These grade 5 girls now operate a school with 15 children under a mango tree in their poor neighbourhood to tutor 15 kids four days a week from 3:00 to 6:00 p.m. after their El Hogar day. They follow the same agenda as El Hogar, use some of the materials, and have recruited another El Hogar student as their physical education teacher.

- Two high school students were part of a "STEAM" training class with the help of an outside agency supporting this across the country. They so impressed their instructors that they were invited to join the Honduras robotics competition team at a world competition event in Greece. On their return, they made a presentation to a group of regional leaders and were offered university scholarships that day.

Association with the inspiring work of El Hogar also has a profound impact on each of us. People come back from the team trips with a different, much more informed view of the world outside of Canada, similar to Western countries. They



Preparing chocolate bark to be sold in the parish as a fundraiser for El Hogar.



Selling products at the Christmas Market.

are very grateful for the "luck" that they were born in Canada with all it has to offer, and are compelled to ask themselves, "What responsibility do I then have?" They also have great admiration for the people who work so hard to overcome their challenges and are dedicated to helping their families and others in their country to have a better life. Students here have changed their direction on university studies, others are ardent supporters of our outreach, and one woman from St. Luke's volunteered at El Hogar for a year and then was hired. She has worked there in Honduras for 10 years.

In an impoverished country

like Honduras, second only to Haiti in the western hemisphere, seeing students of El Hogar believing in themselves and what they can accomplish. [www.elhogar.org](http://www.elhogar.org)

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## Niagara Anglican Deadlines and Submission Guidelines

### Upcoming Deadlines:

April – February 13

May – March 16

June – April 20

### 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)

# Of Pancakes and Ashes

**THE REVEREND ANDREW RAMPTON**

Shrove Tuesday, the day before Ash Wednesday, began as a day when many people would visit their confessor to be shriven. That is, to confess their sins, receive penance, and be absolved. This was the first half of the beginning of a reconciliation process that continued on Ash Wednesday. Shrove Tuesday was about private confession of personal sins, while Ash Wednesday was, and still is, when the church gathers to make a public confession of its common sins. These confessions are the beginning of the Lenten season of preparation and reconciliation. For centuries, many would be preparing to be baptized at the Great Vigil of Easter. Those already baptized shared in their preparations, encouraging the baptizands and readying themselves for the celebrations of Easter.

If Shrove Tuesday is about confession of sin and reconciliation, what do pancakes have to do with it and the ashes of Wednesday? Traditionally, Lent is a season of fasting. Certain foods are set aside as a spiritual discipline, reminding us to remove other distractions and



Photo: Unsplash/Thays Orrico

focus on what is important. Meat, dairy, eggs, and fats like butter or oil were among the foods commonly set aside in Lent. (The day is also known as Fat Tuesday in many cultures.) Pancakes, often with a side of sausage or other meat, were a great meal to use up all of those ingredients that would be off-limits for the next seven weeks or so. Nobody wants to celebrate Easter with rancid oil in the pantry. In many communities, this Shrove Tuesday meal has taken on a celebratory character: One last hurrah before the fasting of Lent.

When Jesus entered Jerusalem

on a donkey, it was seen by many as a thumbing of the nose at the great processions of Roman military leaders. Instead of the expensive laurels and silks of a Roman procession, Jesus is met with common palm branches and the garments of his followers. We remember this event on Passion Sunday each year, when many communities have their own procession, waving palm branches as they walk. Passion Sunday is also the day when many people take home palm fronds and palm crosses to use as focuses for prayer and devotion. These are the same palms that will be burned to make the

ashes for Ash Wednesday.

The ashes which are imposed on us at the beginning of Lent are a sign of our mortality. "Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return." It is not an accident that this moment echoes our funeral rites. The ashes are fragile and dry. One can easily imagine them as dust whipping up from the valley of dry bones in Ezekiel's vision. And the ashes are made from the symbols of what we believed would be a great triumph: Jesus' entering Jerusalem was supposed to be the turning point. The Romans would be ousted, the kingdom of God would appear, and all would be set to right. How little did the cheering crowds waving palms expect the Crucifixion on the horizon. Palms of victory turned to the ash of mortality.

The fragility and fleeting nature of the ashes remind us that we are finite. Suddenly, we share the fate of the eggs, butter, and oil of Shrove Tuesday. We will, one day, go off and return to the stuff of which we were first made. Or, rather, we would crumble away were it not for God's great love for us.

Standing at the edge of the valley, God asks Ezekiel if the val-

ley of bones could live again. If Ezekiel had tried to make them live himself, surely he would have failed. But when Ezekiel gives over the question to God, the bones are knit together, filled with breath, restored to life and purpose. In the same way, we begin our journey through the Lenten valley with reminders of our mortality and the finitude of this life. But on the other side of the valley lies Easter morning and the water of baptism. There we find refreshment in the water that slakes our thirst forever. There we find new life, beyond the life of dust and ash, being given a share in the eternal life of Christ.

Our Lenten journey is meant to be one of preparation and reconciliation. We prepare by setting aside distractions, making room in our lives, and looking for ways to draw nearer to God. Both of our observances, pancakes and ashes, remind us that, without God, we surely will crumble away, helpless in our efforts to give life to ourselves. They also remind us that God waits patiently for us to, once again, turn our hearts and minds and return to our trek toward the water of life.

# Resurrection of Hope in Thundering Waters

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 9

this holy place? The one who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not trust in an idol or swear by a false god. They will receive blessing from the Lord and vindication from God their Saviour. Such is the generation of those who seek him, who seek your face, God of Jacob."

My journey's timing was further blessed in that it took part on the feast day of St. Catharines of Alexandria, the saint to whom the Roman Catholic Cathedral next to St. George's Church is dedicated to. The kinship I feel with this saint is that she was a scholar who effectively debated opponents of Christianity assembled by the cruel Roman Emperor Maximian, whose son was defeated by Constantine in the epic battle of the Milvian Bridge, which ended the persecution of our faith in the Roman Empire.

The prayers that blessed me



Searching in the forest for Liatris Spicata, commonly known as Dense Blazing Star.

Photo: Wikimedia Commons/H.Zell

were helpful when I arrived at Dorchester Avenue in Niagara Falls, south of the Canadian Pacific rail line. I initially received some hostility from a foreman who was directing complex construction activity here. I explained to him that

the purpose of my visit was not sabotage but to collect seeds of the threatened Dense Blazing Star. He had not known that the threatened species was located on the property.

The foreman subsequently googled Dense Blazing Star and read from its description in Wikipedia. He read to me using a Blackberry-type device, how "Liatris spicata is excellent for attracting pollinators and beneficial insects. These include butterflies such as the monarch, tiger swallowtail, clouded sulphur, gray hairstreak, Aphrodite fritillary, painted lady, red admiral and wood nymphs. The flowers attract bumblebees, digger bees, long-horned bees, leaf-cutting bees, skippers and birds, including hummingbirds."

After I succeeded in gathering the seeds, the foreman was impressed that I had discovered them in a desolate landscape of

construction. It was dominated by giant mud piles and a temporary parking lot, complete with a Johnny on the Spot. When accompanied by a conservationist, Derek Jones, a few months later, I visited the site again, and it was much cleaned up, and the wildflower grove appeared to be safe from being buried in excavation for adjacent infrastructure.

The successful prayer-aided pilgrimage to Thundering Waters bore fruit as a result of the need for the company which owns the southern half of the area, Centennial Homes, where the visitation took place, to have zoning amendments for their sought-after reallocation of parkland. This followed a discussion about the area at St. Barnabas Church by the priest-in-charge at the time, the Reverend Michael Mondloch, at an event called the Niagara Estuary. The following day, in

the Niagara Falls City council, a representative from Centennial Homes announced that 75 acres, the very old growth forest area discussed at the Niagara Estuary, would be donated as parkland by the company to the City of Niagara Falls. This shows the power of what is termed the Christian doctrine of "Faithful Persistence" to protect the Earth from the most powerful of adversaries.

My Mohawk friend, Danny Beaton of the Turtle Clan, journeyed to the Niagara Falls City Council to speak out in defence of the Thundering Waters forest. Through his and the faithful persistence of many others, a relic of the old growth forests present when the Treaty of Niagara was signed in 1764 still grows to greater strength.