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A section of the Anglican Journal



NIAGARA ANGLICAN



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DECEMBER 2024

ADVENT the Season for Being Missionally-Minded



THE REVEREND CANON DR IAN MOBSBY

Advent, a season marked by anticipation and preparation, invites Christians to reflect on the dual themes of hope and mission. As we await the celebration of Christ's birth in the feast of the 'Christ-Mass' the call to mission becomes more pronounced, reminding us of

the purpose behind the coming of Jesus into the world.

Advent spans four weeks leading up to Christmas, beginning in days of darkness that remind us of the desert and Jesus' preparation for his ministry. It is a time of prayer, reflection, and awaiting. In this context, we are encouraged to prepare our hearts and minds for the coming of Christ, both in the celebration of

His birth and in the anticipation of His second coming.

The biblical basis for mission in the season of Advent can be traced back to the Old Testament, where God called out Abraham to be a blessing to the nations, setting a precedence for God's overarching plan for humanity. In Genesis 12:1-3, God promises Abraham that through him, all nations will be blessed.

This foundational call signifies that God's intention has always been to encompass the entire world as God restores all things back into right relationship with God (2 Corinthians 5 and 6) through us.

In the New Testament, Jesus crystallizes this mission in the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20), commanding God's disciples to "go therefore and make

disciples of all nations." This call to being missional underscores the Church's call to spread the Gospel, a mandate that resonates profoundly during the Advent season. A mandate that begins with us, to again commit to follow the way of Jesus and then to live in a way that opens this way for others. We look ...

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150th Synod Inspires a Hope-Filled Look at 'Faith in the Future'

November 2, 2024, marked a historic moment in the Diocese of Niagara—the 150th Synod! The theme for this year was 'Faith in the Future' inspired by Jeremiah 29:11, "For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope." The day inspired a hopeful look forward for the diocese.

After a warm welcome from Bishop Susan Bell and territorial acknowledgement by Archdeacon Jeff Ward, the morning began with a gather-

ing Eucharist. Bishop Bell then delivered her Charge to the 150th Synod reflecting on the progress made since the COVID pandemic. The bishop delivered words of praise and gratitude for the faithful service of the members of the diocese, "Well done, Niagara" she said.

Before ending her charge, Bishop Bell, in conjunction with Dean Tim Dobbin, recognized the extraordinary service of Garfield Adams, Ellie Clitheroe, Malcolm French, Naomi Kabugi, and Tom Vaughan by naming them as honorary canons of



Celebration of the Eucharist at Synod.

All Synod photos: William Pleydon

Christ's Church Cathedral.

After the morning break and the approval of both the credentials committee report and the consent agenda, the bishop acknowledged the generous support for the Synod by lead sponsor, Ecclesiastical Insurance. Ross and McBride and All Spec Building Inspections sponsored aspects of the Synod.

Dr. Emily Hill, parish development missionary, made a presentation on the renewal of the diocesan Mission Action

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150th Synod

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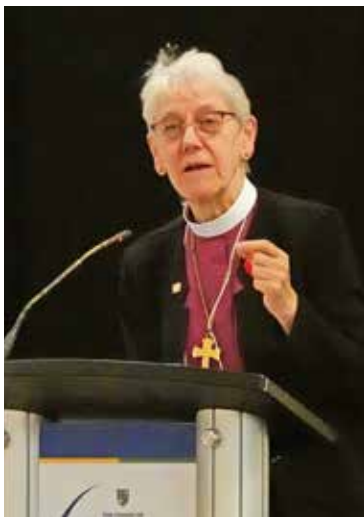
Plan. She acknowledged that the success of the current plan was possible because it was embraced together, as a whole, not only as a goal-setting tool but as a means of discerning God's plan for the communities of the diocese.

The Mission Action Plan (MAP) was designed as a living process, always adapting and growing. At the start of 2024, the diocese recognized the need to renew its Mission Action Plan goals and encouraged parishes to do the same. To support parishes, the diocese recently released a MAP 2.0 parish guide. "Here's something to celebrate," Hill said, "75% of parishes participated in the first MAP (2022-2024)."

Hill went on to highlight some of the remarkable parish stories that have emerged from the process including:

- **Church of the Epiphany in Oakville**, which developed a Death and Bereavement Film series fostering a meaningful space to explore death through shared learning, support, and faith-centered reflection on life and mortality.
 - **All Saints, Dain City**, creating a thriving community garden and developing canning and cooking workshops to support it and the community.
 - **Grace Church in Waterdown**, which launched the Graceful Abilities Day Program to support adults with physical and developmental disabilities providing an opportunity for community, belonging, and respite for families.
- Looking forward, Hill shared the renewed priorities for MAP 2.0, keeping a Christ-centered focus on God's mission as the top priority, followed by being a hope-filled and missionally-focused diocese. Together, the priorities will guide the development of new contextual missions emerging from the gifts, needs, dreams, and desires of parishes and missions.

The process to renew the diocesan MAP gathered feedback from focus groups, surveys, prayer, and active listening. While the vision of the diocese remains the same (Called to Life—Compelled to Love), a minor revision to the diocesan mission statement was made. It is now: "Ignited by the irresistible love of Jesus and renewed by the Holy Spirit, we partner



Archbishop Linda Nicholls addressed Synod in the afternoon.

with God to deepen faith, join God's mission, and care for God's world."

Members of synod voted whole-heartedly in favour of the motion to affirm the renewal of the diocesan Mission Action Plan.

Following this inspiring moment, Chancellor Greg Tweney, and Archdeacon Bill Mous brought forward two proposed canon changes. Amendments to Canon 2.8 regarding the diocesan budget, and Canon 3.2 regarding Licensed Lay Workers were both carried.

New Diocesan Treasurer and Director of Finance, Christine Morrow addressed the Synod speaking on the 2023 Auditors report and the audited consolidated financial statements. This was followed by a motion to appoint KPMG as the auditors for 2024. The motion was carried without debate.

Bishop Bell was delighted to welcome Dr. Scott Brubacher, executive director of the Anglican Foundation of Canada, to share about the amazing work the foundation supports across the Diocese of Niagara and the Anglican Church of Canada. Brubacher shared that since 2010, the Anglican Foundation of Canada has provided \$410,000 in support to the diocese, supporting community ministries, leadership and education, diverse infrastructure, Indigenous ministries, and sacred music and liturgical arts. Recent grants highlighted in his presentation included \$15,000 to St. Luke's, Smithville for an accessibility project, the Say Yes to Kids campaign which recently provided support to Canterbury Hills Camp, and \$10,000 for a student leadership program

with the Ecumenical Campus Ministry at the University of Guelph.

In the afternoon, Bishop Bell welcomed Archbishop Linda Nicholls, recently retired primate of the Anglican Church of Canada, to speak on "This Anglican Communion of Ours." The archbishop delivered an insightful perspective on the workings of the Anglican Communion drawing on her own inspiring, and thought-provoking experiences through her years of leadership and episcopal ministry.

Archdeacon Peter Scott and Treasurer Christine Morrow then presented the 2025 diocesan budget. They highlighted how, through Diocesan Mission & Ministry contributions, parishes build up the whole of God's Church and support God's mission locally to globally. The treasurer noted that revenues are expected to increase in 2025 which reflects our recovery from the pandemic. On the expenditure side, significant efforts were made to maintain costs as much as possible while maintaining the diocesan ministry capacity. Due to draws on reserve funds generously given as legacy gifts over the years, as well as a repayment of a mortgage, the diocese is projected to have an overall cash surplus in 2025.

"This sesquicentennial budget represents the Diocese of Niagara's compelling witness of love and demonstrates there is continued growth in the energy and enthusiasm within parishes for leaning more deeply into Jesus-shaped living and discipleship that moves us closer to God's reign," said Archdeacon Peter Scott, chair of the budget committee. Members of Synod overwhelmingly passed the 2025 diocesan budget, representing an investment of 3.8 million dollars in ministry.

Deirdre Pike, diocesan program consultant for justice and outreach, and Bruce MacKenzie, chair of Climate Justice Niagara, spoke to Synod about the Communion Forest Initiative. Members learned about the number of partnerships required to support the growth of the Communion Forest in the diocese. With the support of the Anglican Foundation of Canada, Green Venture, and Neighbourwoods, Climate Justice Niagara involved

seven parishes this year in the initiative. The process begins with the tree inventory, measuring and assessing health, and developing plans to protect and support them. The presentation highlighted wonderful stories of development focusing on tree planting at St. Paul's, Westdale; St. David's, Welland; a partnership with St. Christopher's and St. John's in Burlington; and the planting of a mini forest of over 400 trees at St. Paul's, Caledonia.

Amy Collard and Susan Little, two of Niagara's ten-member delegation for the Provincial Synod, shared a report about the recent Synod in Sault Ste. Marie. Together, they reflected on the theme of the Provincial Synod 'Conversations at the Crossroads.' The two discussed the three days of panel discussions and reports, presentations from The Primate's Commission on Reimagining the Church, Bishop Bell on the Provincial Vocations Conference, the Anglican Foundation of Canada, the Primate's World Relief and Development Fund (now Alongside Hope) and more.

The delegates noted how particularly impactful the visit to the Shingwauk Residential School site was sharing the history and the work it contin-

ues to inspire towards further truth and reconciliation.

They also shared that after the approval of a constitutional change, Canon Greg Tweney, was appointed to the newly established position of vice chancellor for the Ecclesiastical Province of Ontario, concurrently with his role as diocesan chancellor.

Amy Collard and Rob Towler will be representing the Diocese of Niagara for the next three years on the provincial executive council, along with Bishop Susan Bell.

In its final segment, Dean Peter Elliot joined the Synod on Zoom to engage members of Synod with the work of the Primate's Commission on Reimagining the Church. The commission was announced at the 2023 General Synod by Archbishop Linda Nicholls, who asked the commission to think creatively about the church's life, 'reimagine' what changes need to be made to structures and resources so that the gospel could continue to be at the centre of who we are, and to bring these recommendations to the General Synod in 2025. It is expected that this work

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150th Synod

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

will continue into the 2025-2028 triennium.

After spirited table discussions on the Commission's seven hypotheses, Archdeacon Mous facilitated a brief report back. Members of synod shared that all the hypotheses would require considerable research, thought, discernment, and prayer. They suggested they might be reassessed with a more hopeful outlook to their impacts on the future. Archdeacon Mous encouraged everyone to complete the Commission's public survey.

The bishop then reported on the selection of the regional representatives to Synod Council, as follows: for the region of Brock,

Canon Pat Davis; for the Greater Wellington region, John Laidlaw; for Hamilton-Haldimand, Bev Groombridge; for Lincoln, Byron Nicholson; and for Trafalgar, Canon Malcolm French. These members were duly elected by Synod.

The results of the online election for delegates to General Synod, happening next June, were also shared. Representing the Order of Clergy are Dean Tim Dobbin, Archdeacon Bill Mous, and Archdeacon Terry Holub. Representing the Order of Laity are Susan Little, Amy Collard, and Adam McNeil.

Bishop Susan Bell then gave her assent to all the acts and resolutions brought forward to



Youth delegates to Synod pose with members of the head table.

the 150th Synod of the Diocese of Niagara. The bishop closed with words of gratitude to those staff and volunteers who made the day happen and to the members of synod. Bishop Bell told

members they are a blessing from God to this diocese, who so powerfully demonstrate that we truly are Called to Life and Compelled to Love.

The Convening Circular and list of resolutions, the proposed budget, and other documents can be found by visiting niagaraanglican.ca/synod/2024.

Advent

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

... forward again to the miracle of the arrival of the hoped for Emmanuel, and we await with Mary in expectant hope of this coming, recognizing this as the fulfilment of God's mission to save and redeem through the love of God.

During Advent, the mission aspect of the season becomes particularly relevant. It is a time when the Church is called to embody the hope and joy of the Gospel, extending love and service to others in our neighbourhoods. The act of waiting for Christ's return is not a passive endeavour; it compels believers to actively engage in their communities, reflecting the light of Christ in a world often shrouded in darkness. As Jesus is to be sent into the world as the Messiah, coming in love but total powerlessness, so we as followers are sent into the world to be part of God's love mission on this earth. Saying all of this though, we are called to be loving fruit in the world, not dispassionate second-hand car salespersons selling Christianity

as if it is a consumer product. Not as fundamentalist nuts, but instead modelling our engagement with those who are not Christian or have fallen out of the way of following God, in the loving way Jesus did—full of humility and loving kindness trusting that through us, God's Kingdom is manifested.

The themes of hope, peace, joy, and love—traditionally associated with each week of Advent—can serve as guiding principles for our missionality, as we live out our faith in the context of the world. For instance, the hope we celebrate in Advent should inspire acts of compassion and mission, as we share the reality of the Good News of God with all, including those who are lonely, isolated, marginalized, or suffering. The peace of Christ calls us to be peacemakers in our communities, working towards reconciliation and understanding. This is a challenge for many parts of our diocese, where there is a considerable amount of unhappy and dissatisfied people

who feel victimized by the way our world is. This includes the reality of a crisis in many communities, the toxic combination of acute mental health issues, unemployment or insecure employment, addiction, and homelessness. So being missional is not just about social justice projects, but about how we live, our being faithful to Jesus as sources of loving kindness and hope in a time of ongoing cultural crises.

Choosing to live this way in a missional advent focus of hope, not only meets the immediate needs of people but also creates opportunities for meaningful conversations about faith and the reason for our hope. Another practical expression of mission can be found in the tradition of Advent calendars, which can be adapted to include daily acts of kindness or prayers for specific individuals or communities in need. This reinforces the idea that each day is an opportunity to reflect Christ's love and light.

As we celebrate Advent,

Christians are reminded that the birth of Jesus is more than just an historical event; it is the embodiment of God's mission to humanity. Jesus came to bring life, to heal, and to reconcile us to God. This mission is now entrusted to God's followers which through the generations, includes us, who are called to be the hands and feet of Jesus in the world.

Understanding the missional focus of Advent serves as a powerful reminder of the intrinsic connection between anticipation and mission. As we prepare to celebrate Christ's birth, we are called to actively participate in God's redemptive work in the

world. Embracing this mission can transform our Advent observance from mere tradition into a vibrant expression of faith, embodying the hope and love that Jesus Christ brought into the world. By focusing on mission during this sacred season, we not only honour the gift of Christ's birth but also extend this gift to others, including people we do not know in moments of connection, those who are acquaintances, and those who are our friends. We then, by choosing to live this way, reflect the light of God's love in a world that desperately needs it.

Prayer for a Missional Advent

Gracious God, as we enter this season of Advent, open our hearts to your call. Help us to be bearers of your light in a world longing for hope. Inspire us to reach out to those in need, to share the joy of your coming with those who feel lost or forgotten. May our preparations for Christ's birth lead us to serve others, reflecting your love in all we do. Grant us courage to act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with you. Amen.



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**CALLED TO LIFE
COMPELLED TO LOVE**

In other words

The Gospel according to the Grinch

**JOHN BOWEN**

Stories are mysterious things. Some of them crop up in every culture across the centuries. Sometimes they turn up in different forms, but still with a recognizable family likeness. There seems to be something about certain stories that appeal very deeply to the human race.

I think this is probably one reason people love *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*. The heart of Dr Seuss's story as it is told in the book is really very simple. The Grinch, who is green and ugly and mean, lives outside Whoville in a cave on top of Mount Crumpet. He hates Christmas for the simple reason that his heart is two sizes too small. So, he sneaks into the village on Christmas Eve and steals all the children's toys. Then he waits to hear their wailing . . . but it never comes. Instead, he hears them singing for joy because they know that Christmas is not about presents, so they are not fazed by the loss of their presents. The Grinch realizes the error of his ways, his heart grows three sizes bigger, he gives the gifts back, and he joins in the fun.

The book and the movie

But the Jim Carrey movie version of the story adds two more things. It develops the character of Cindy Lou Who (who just has one line in the book). She becomes the Grinch's saviour: she believes he can change, struggles to the top of Mount Crumpet through deep snow, and invites him to come to the celebration in the village. As so often in popular stories, she's an unlikely saviour: think Frodo and Sam in *Lord of the Rings*.

The other thing we discover from the movie is that the Grinch once lived in Whoville but ran away because the other children mocked him. So, at the end of the story, when he comes to Whoville, he's coming back to the place that was once his home. The idea of a journey "there and back" also occurs in stories all over the world, from the *Odyssey* to *Lord of the Rings*.

So, there are three themes: in the book, the nasty, mean outsider; and in the movie, the unlikely saviour and the journey back home.

Why do we like stories like this? Tolkien said it's because those stories are echoes of the Great Story, the story God is writing about our world. And because this story is so profoundly true and beautiful, its echoes touch us deeply, and so we tell and retell them in a thousand forms. And maybe God is trying to get our attention through those stories.

So, the story of the Grinch resonates with that other story. Think of it this way:

The Grinch and God's story

Firstly: why do we like stories about outsiders? Maybe it's because we all feel like outsiders in one situation or another. So, we feel for outsiders like the Grinch, and we identify with him. And maybe, at some deep intuitive level, we have a memory of being expelled from the Garden of Eden (however you understand that story), and of being outsiders ever since.

Secondly: Why are we drawn by stories of unlikely saviours? Tolkien would say it's because they anticipate the saviour of the world, who is not who you would expect in a million years: born in Nazareth, a backwater of the Roman empire, a carpenter who never wrote a book, never went to university, and didn't look like anyone's image of the Messiah.

And, lastly, there's this idea of the journey, where you leave home, have adventures both good and bad, and finally come home again. In a sense, isn't that the human story? That humanity began as friends of God, but then we chose to go our own way—as Jesus explained it, like a kid who runs away from home to have a good time, at least until the money runs out . . . and then grudgingly comes home.

In other words, the Grinch is about us: choosing to be outsiders to God's joy and home and family, then an unlikely saviour who comes to invite us to the party, and finally a journey back home. There is a place in the teaching of Jesus where he sums up these three themes. It's not a particularly Christmassy reading but there is a connection: it's the story of the lost sheep.

You remember that story? The story of the good shepherd (another unlikely saviour) who comes to look for the sheep that's strayed from the fold—the outsider—and then brings it back home, so that the great party can begin?

That is really the Christmas story: of the Saviour who came as the shepherd to our world to search for the lost sheep, and to bring it home on his shoulder. The only question is . . . when he comes looking for us, are we willing to be found?

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We're Dreaming of a Greener Christmas

SUE CARSON AND MEMBERS OF CLIMATE JUSTICE NIAGARA

The Climate Justice Niagara committee would like to wish everyone a very Green Christmas. Below are some ideas to ensure our Christmas footprint is as small as possible.

Now, please don't cast us in the Grinch framework. Our suggestions are not intended to take the enjoyment and love out of the holiday season; instead, they may create some fun and stretch your imaginations.

We write this as the Season of Creation is just ending and hope that our understanding about caring for Christ's beautiful world continues throughout all the seasons. Our ideas may also help keep your money in local businesses and out of the hands of big box store owners and home delivery services.

So here are some thoughts to consider:

Gifts

- Don't turn on your computers to order gifts; visit the shops in your neighbourhood. The savings of plastic and Styrofoam packaging will be enormous. It also keeps trucks and vans off the roads.
- Those church bazaars are amazing places to find unique gifts that artistic people have produced.
- Create a homemade gift or offer to give a service, such as: "cleaning out grandpa's garage".
- Consider buying tickets for a show, a sporting event, or a meal out. The gift lasts longer than Christmas Day and your kindness and love will be remembered later.
- Buy fewer plastic items – choose wooden toys for young children.
- Avoid items that need batteries.
- Buy gifts from PWRDF or an environmental charity.
- Shop for gifts at thrift stores; or re-gift.
- Organize a Secret Santa within a group/family.
- Just buy less

Food

- Shop for locally grown food or at least items grown in Canada.
- Source meat from farms that let the animals live more

healthy lives before becoming our food.

- Bake goodies for friends.

Decorating

- Wrap gifts in compostable paper e.g. colourful comic newspaper.
- Material bags can be used year after year. Or use bright tea towels or napkins to wrap your gifts and tie them with red wool rather than ribbon.
- Use natural items for decorating. (Branches, pinecones, popcorn, cranberries)
- Use last year's cards to create little boxes or name tags.
- Create your cards or send e-cards.
- Use real napkins, not paper.

The Tree

- A real tree, or a plastic one? Once a plastic tree is produced, even if it lasts 20 years or more, it will always be there. When it stops gracing your living room for 4 weeks every year it will take up landfill space for maybe 50 years or more.
- Could this be the year to cut down your tree; make it a family outing.
- In January see if a nearby

conservation area or the Royal Botanical Garden can use your Christmas trees for fish barriers in lakes and wetlands.

- Buy a smaller tree in a pot that can be planted in the spring. Explore the idea of renting a tree that is later returned.
- Avoid tinsel for decorating trees—it is impossible to remove every piece.
- Use LED lights.

Remember that at the end of Dr. Suess's book, *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*, the Grinch understands what the people of Whoville already knew.

"Maybe Christmas, he thought, 'doesn't come from a store,

Maybe Christmas... perhaps... Means a little bit more!"

As Christians, this message may be obvious but sometimes forgotten.

All that came to be was alive with His life, and that life was the light of all people. The light shines on in the dark, and the darkness has never mastered it. John 1:4-5.

The Climate Justice Committee wishes you a very light-filled, green Christmas.



Hand made decorations, possibly purchased from a church bazaar, add a personal touch.

Photo: Contributed by Sue Carson



Wrapping gifts in fabric which can be reused is better for the planet and the wallet.

Photo: Unsplash/Joanna Kosinska



A real tree with LED lights and no tinsel—making the tree compostable—is a green choice.

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The Bishop's Charge to Synod

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SUSAN BELL

Dear members of Synod, dear people of God: how can we have faith in the future?

We live bravely in a time of uncertainty and courageously in a time of discontinuous change—a time when we're experiencing unpredictable shifts in our culture. And when issues like political unpredictability, the climate crisis, or cost of living crisis, to name a few, are ever before us, what does it mean to have faith in the future?

Well, I think it requires this of us: to lift our heads from our concerns and look to the promises of God.

Because God wants the best for us. I know that because it's right here in black and white in our family story; listen to this:

"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you," declares the Lord."

Of course, God is speaking in the first instance through the prophet to a people who had undergone a great hardship. The people of Israel had been conquered by ruthless Babylon and were in exile—strangers in a strange land—undergoing financial and cultural hardship and were deeply discouraged. And Jeremiah speaks these gentle and encouraging words into that context.

The scriptures show us that God's heart has always been, from Genesis to Revelation, for us. It has always been oriented toward loving us, to wanting the best for us—God's children—to desiring to draw us to God and to each other in love and unity. Scripture is among many things, the record of how God keeps God's promises despite the best this world and we can do to avoid that love and break covenant with the Lord.

So, in order to have faith in the future we need to double down on what we know about God—that it is the character of God: to give, to be found, to plan good for us, to love us.

And it is the same character of communities formed in the



image of this love too.

And we hear something similar in our Synod's Gospel: "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened."

As we are formed to become more and more like Christ over our lifetimes, we know that Christian community offers an alternative—even a rebuke—to the uncertainty and dehumanization we face in our culture. It is a place—at its best—where the love of God is our face to the world.

It is for this reason that we need to keep our eyes focused on Christ (as Hebrews 12 says) because Jesus is our template for how to be fully human in this world.

God wants the best for us.

And hasn't that been our experience over the years of COVID and since?

We have experienced God's plan for us for good and not for harm. After a period of hardship and uncertainty, we have felt the good come upon us—gently and imperceptibly at first—and then palpably at last. We have asked, knocked and sought God—and we have received as a diocese.

You know, I have an old friend who often says that if you want to see the arc of progress sometimes you need to look backward—he says it's like going to the back of a big ship like the Queen Mary and looking at the

wake—the pattern of the waves—and you can see that gradually you're turning, but the ship is so big that the turn felt almost imperceptible. And yet the wake is there.

The reality is, progress has been made.

Well friends, progress has been made across our diocese too. Perhaps not evenly, and I understand the problems that were present before the pandemic are often still present—perhaps made even more acute by a slow recovery. But that means more than ever we need to keep our eyes focussed on Christ and be listening for the wisdom of the Spirit in these times.

But there has still been progress. There is still a wake to celebrate.

Did you know that Easter attendance across the diocese was up 20% year over year? And did you know that Christmas attendance was up 50% year over year? And did you know that our Diocesan Mission and Ministry contributions are trending along the most positive forecast? The stats don't lie.

Even if this is "just" folks returning after the pandemic—that is not to be taken lightly because there are plenty of places where folks aren't returning at all.

But I have to tell you that I think it is more than that. Anecdotally, across the diocese I am hearing about and seeing a lot of new people in our pews. In particular, I am tremendously

proud of the way our parishes and missions have welcomed newcomers to our country and to our churches. I have had some wonderful experiences meeting them and hearing their stories on my travels. And what I have heard most often is their deep gratitude for the way they feel loved by our welcome. ...

So, let us stay the course.

What else can we notice and celebrate? Well, how about the fact that we have come to year five with our diocesan Mission Action Plan—and boy, have we worked it! We have been faithful to what we discerned was our work over these past five years.

But there's one place where I know we haven't achieved our full potential and that is in the area of faith formation. For that reason, and because it is so important, foundational even, we have made provision in the budget for an experienced person to be a diocesan resource for faith formation. The position is half-time for now, and so important do I believe it to be to our overall diocesan spiritual health, that it is my hope that it will become a full-time position in time.

Just on the MAP in general: what I hear over and over again, is the impact that the planning process has had on parish life. Intentional discernment about where God is calling the family of faith is yielding results. We are truly called to life and compelled to love! I have felt the surge in energy in parishioners; I have seen the excitement about ministry again. All of this is exciting because it works. There's the wake: it works. Dr. Emily Hill will update us on the progress and planning for a MAP 2.0 for the diocese a little later in Synod. And she's also done yeoman duty in midwifing MAP 2.0 for parishes.

You know another friend of mine—a successful businessman and coach—really endorses planning in his secular work as well as in the church. But he says, and this is interesting—the plan is not really the thing—it's what he calls the strategic by-products of the plan that are the real bonus. It's the side streets the MAP guides us down and the people and opportunities for relationship and mission that we find in addition to what we plan for that are the real gift of mission action planning. I think

we can call that the intervention and leading of the Holy Spirit and it's a tremendous blessing.

I hope you keep that in mind as you do the work of revising your MAPs. I pray God's blessing on you in that work and pray that you will make it a habit of faith to plan in this way over and again.

It's another way that we love God and love the world that God loves so much.

Okay, what else can we notice?

So, this is what I observe around the diocese: when we held our regional town halls, I heard a great deal of anxiety around resources and about voluntarism. And in retrospect, it's not surprising. At that time, we were on the cusp of recovery post-COVID, but we hadn't yet leaned into it in the way we are now. As a result, what I heard was a rhetoric of scarcity and worry. I listened to that and we—all together, all of us—decided not to proceed with the diocesan capital campaign even though most of the resources raised would have stayed in the parish. But it was just too early in our recovery cycle.

Now what I've observed in the months since, is the growing number of stewardship campaigns in the parish. So that tells me that our campaign discernment has borne fruit of a different kind than I'd anticipated—but that's the Holy Spirit for you! She blows where she will! And that's something to celebrate—a wonderful, if unintentional consequence of discernment from the capital campaign.

It's truly great news that you feel sufficiently confident to think about local ministry and mission again. It's great that many of you are also able to plan for capital improvements to our buildings—our containers for that ministry. ...

So now I want to talk to you about leadership. You and I know that good, creative, skilled, stable clergy leadership equals (all things remaining the same) a healthy, creative, non-anxious parish family. One that is willing and able to become a mixed ecology church where traditional ministry happens but also new, creative, mission-focused ministry. One that is able to meet the challenges of today and to live

Continued Page 7

The Bishop's Charge

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6

with confidence into tomorrow.

Where does this kind of leadership come from?

Well, the Niagara School for Missional Leadership for one. It's another strategic by-product of our MAP. It has become an incubator for diocesan leadership—lay and ordained. Now this is your school, not someone else's—it's there for your education and interest. I am so very pleased to say that we have partnered with Huron College to offer courses to their students as well. This was a wonderful affirmation of all the hard work that has happened over the last four years to establish and then refine the work of the school. The offerings are for everyone—this is for lay people as much as those who are in ministry training. ...

Over the last three years I have also chaired the provincial vocations conference. Our very own Archbishop Colin Johnson has been the facilitator of the conference as well. A bunch of us got together about 10 years ago to try and figure out why we are experiencing a shortage of clergy. The problem is not a new one and it's been brewing for a generation. It is affecting us across the country in the large centres and in the smaller, rural areas.

Something interesting happened at the end of the three years that we devoted to examining what was going right and wrong in the search for candidates for ordained ministry. I'll summarize our findings. This is a very basic summary you understand, but is a crucial finding. It amounts to this: the church is not doing her part in raising up candidates for the priesthood.

It's not that they aren't there—they are. But we've stopped encouraging vocations from among us. We could posit lots of ideas as to why, but let's just say that the issue is complex. But let me ask you this: when was the last time you spoke to a talented young person and asked them if they might consider a vocation as a deacon or priest in the Church? Because it's everyone's job to encourage vocations. And then let me ask you this: have you ever spoken to one of your children or your grandchildren about a vocation? Answer to yourself—now, why?

Or, why not? Something to think about. Something to pray about. Something to take action about.

Which is all to say, we have very few vocations from the midst of us and we need many more. There's a good and rigorous process: discernment; education and formation; there's a curacy and there's lifelong learning in their vocation. It's all there.

And I'm telling you, there's no life like it. Ask any clergyperson going about their vocation joyfully—there's no life like it.

So, we're consciously recruiting priests to serve in the church of God. You may have noticed that I ordained five fine priests and received one more fine priest a few weeks ago, so our numbers are slowly increasing. But we need many more.

Added to a general shortage, we are experiencing a generational shift as well. In September, it got so I didn't want to answer the phone anymore, so many retirements did I accept! It's all good and natural and I am enormously grateful to all our long-serving and faithful clergy who have retired—many of whom still serve in interim ministry for us. We literally couldn't minister across the diocese without your help, so thank you.

Now, to that 150th Anniversary Curacy Fund. When I ordain a transitional deacon, they then spend two years in a kind of apprenticeship with another skilled priest. They learn how to be a competent and hopefully creative priest. That's a tall order; there's lots to learn about becoming mixed ecology parishes.

Like the fact that healthy parishes do both new and old things. That might be reaching out to those who do not yet know the name of Jesus with conversation or working at side-by-side justice ministries that demonstrate the love of God in community. And those things are held alongside more traditional outreach and Christian education ministries.

So transitional deacons learn in this kind of environment in different parishes all across the diocese. The thing is, they need experience in all kinds of parishes—rural and urban—big and small.

Currently, I'm in a bit of a bind: I am unable to place



curates in smaller parishes that may not be able to bear the whole cost of an additional stipend. That means that curates are denied the experience they might gain there. That is a problem because the vast majority of our parishes are in smaller communities. And by not giving our curates experience in these places, we are just not setting folks up for success.

But with a curacy fund that is endowed long into the future, it then becomes possible to place new clergy into formational situations that will build competencies in a number of contexts. We can then work in partnership with parishes to become places of education and formation that benefit everyone. That is good for our new clergy and good for the Church.

And there are those who have caught this vision. I am deeply humbled by a legacy gift already of a quarter of a million dollars toward this new Curacy Fund made in our anniversary year. I am profoundly grateful to the donors for their trust and for their vision. That is faith in the future. And I am in receipt of more gifts from folks who understand the importance of this legacy fund. It'll be here long after we're all gone to ensure that parishes receive the best formed priests we can muster.

Now there's a special person among us whose role and joy it is to work with folks who would like to leave a legacy gift to support the church. His name is The Rev'd Canon Dr. Drew MacDonald. Drew would be pleased to speak with any of you about stewardship or the ways in which our Foundation can multiply any gift you would like to give.

Again, I thank those who have already contributed to this vision, and I pray that there are

others here today whose hearts may be moved to have faith in the future too and to decide to support the leadership of all the parishes in our diocese in this way as an outworking of the Great Commandment. If you want to make a gift, there is a special QR code or page on our website that will direct you to a place where you can do that.

Love God and love the world that God loves so much.

Speaking of love in action, as you know, it's been my habit to recognize just a few ordained leaders each year for their extraordinary service to the diocese and make them canons of our cathedral in conjunction with Dean Tim Dobbin.

This year, in recognition of our 150th anniversary and in recognition of the many who have served above and beyond for the diocese there are a few more canons to be named. So, without further ado, I am pleased to name the following as honorary canons of Christ's Church Cathedral: Garfield Wu, Ellie Clitheroe, Malcolm French, Naomi Kabugi, and Tom Vaughan.

Many congratulations to you all on behalf of Dean Tim and myself.

I need hardly say that these are folks who have distinguished themselves by trying hard, by going above and beyond in joining God's mission in Smithville, Oakville, Hamilton, and St. Catharines—all over our beloved diocese. ...

I am also thankful for each one of you—and of the folks you represent.

Thank you for your partnership in the Gospel, for the love and the respect and most especially the trust you offer me year in, year out. Together, we are listening for the Spirit's leading—together, we are responding with faith, hope, and love.

One last thing: as I embarked on my sabbatical, somehow I thought that maybe with time and stillness, it was possible that I might return to you having heard something new from God—a new plan—that some vision might descend from on high that was different from what we were currently doing. It makes me smile now to think about that.

It didn't. At least not entirely. What did keep coming to me in the midst of all the work to convalesce is that what we had to do was to keep our eyes focused on Christ—and if we did that, the rest would come right. That's why I chose the Hebrews passage we read a little earlier.

And I believe that to be profoundly true. If Jesus is the centre, and that centre holds, against all the uncertainty and challenge of our times, if we look to the ways that we know that God always keeps God's promises, if we seek God with our whole hearts, and if we count on the love we find in our seeking and on each other, then that is the gift we offer to our world: to be that loving, incarnational presence.

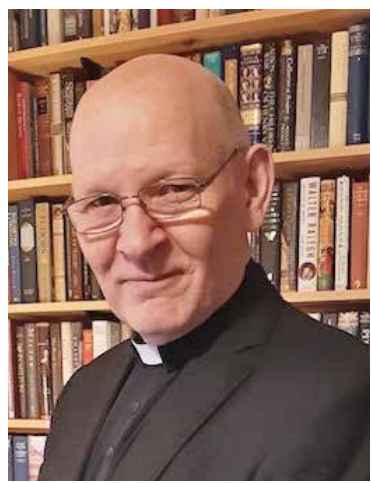
This I know for sure: it is the antidote to the loneliness, the anxiety, the polarization, and the dehumanization of our times.

So, members of Synod, my essential, irreducible charge to you and to the faithful across our beloved diocese is this: keep your eyes firmly focused on Christ. Stay the course. Love God and love the world that God loves so much.

In the name of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

The bishop's charge has been edited for space considerations; the full text can be found on the diocesan website.

Forgiveness Without an Apology



THE REVEREND MICHAEL COREN

Of all the things I thought might happen in my life, my name being spoken by a film star on stage at the Royal Court Theatre and my voice portrayed by a leading actor wasn't high on the list. But it happened earlier this year when John Lithgow starred as Roald Dahl in *Giant* by Mark Rosenblatt. The reviews were outstanding, I had the pleasure of spending time with Lithgow and the rest of the stellar cast, and cliché aside, it was quite an evening.

My connection to Dahl goes back to 1983 when as a very young journalist working for the *New Statesman*, I was asked to interview Dahl after he'd written a review of a book called *God*

Cried, an account of Israel's invasion of Lebanon in 1982. But rather than an objective discussion he wrote of "a race of people" who had "switched so rapidly from victims to barbarous murderers", and that the US was "so utterly dominated by the great Jewish financial institutions" that "they dare not defy" Israel.

When I initially asked Dahl for an interview he was gracious and willing. The actual telephone interview began with me telling him I was a fan of his work. Then, sure that he'd make some sort of apology about the article, I asked about what he'd written. With no change of tone, he began, "There is a trait in the Jewish character that does provoke animosity. Maybe it's a kind of lack of generosity towards non-Jews", and then, "I mean, there's always a reason why 'anti-anything' crops up anywhere. Even a stinker like Hitler didn't just pick on them for no reason."

I was in my early 20s, just out of university, and frankly a little out of my depth. I wondered if I'd misheard him, or even if this was obscure satire. He confirmed that I hadn't, that he meant it, and repeated it to make sure. I paused, gath-

ered my thoughts, and then explained that three of my grandparents were Jewish and that what he'd just said was stupid and repulsive. It was as though I hadn't spoken, hadn't responded. He simply ignored me and continued, with some nonsense about how he'd fought in World War Two and that he and his friends never saw any Jewish soldiers.

I stopped him and said that they couldn't have looked very hard because there were hundreds of thousands, in all the allied armies, navies, and air forces. Many of them were heroes, and my grandpa, a Whitechapel tailor before the war, won medals fighting in North Africa, Sicily, and Italy. Jewish men and women were, I continued, probably over-represented in the armed forces.

My interview was published in the *New Statesman*. There was some controversy and shock, but this was before social media and 24-hour news, and the entire incident seemed to pass within a week. It didn't pass me of course, and I've never forgotten what he said and how I felt. In the years since then, my interview has sometimes been mentioned, often without acknowledgment. Even a family member who is



Roald Dahl with Michael Coren

Photo: Michael Coren

a well-known journalist said to me once, "I didn't know that was you!" Oh well, not being linked to Dahl won't lose me any sleep.

The play has changed all that of course, and I'm confident that it will transfer to New York, perhaps Toronto. I'll try not to let the attention go to my head! But there's another issue, a quintessentially Christian issue, and that's the challenge of forgiveness. It's something that should always be of concern but is particularly pertinent around the Christmas season, with thoughts and prayers around new life, new birth, and the world's great reboot.

As followers of Jesus we're called to forgive, it's not an

option, not a vague suggestion. And, indeed, in my life, I've forgiven numerous times, sometimes after dreadful attacks on me and my family. But is forgiveness part of an equation, a grace-filled symbiosis whereby wrong-doers have to apologize before they can be forgiven?

I think not. Apologies, contrition, and even penance are vital for the sinner, and only by such reform and change can they genuinely change, improve, and be clean. But the victim can forgive without all this, and by doing so we bring ourselves closer to Christ. Without giving names, I've consciously forgiven journalists and activists who have told quite vile lies about me, and I know that they feel no sense of guilt for what they did. My Christian response, however, is that it's what I, not they, do that matters.

As for Roald Dahl, he never withdrew a word and even doubled down on it all in later years. But hand on heart I forgive him. Anyway, his cruelty led me to get to know some of the finest actors in modern theatre and movies! You see, God really does move in wonderfully mysterious ways. Merry Christmas!

Anniversary Fund Will Invest in Priestly Formation

At Synod, Bishop Susan Bell launched a special endowment fund to mark the diocese's sesquicentennial. This 150th Anniversary Curacy Fund has been created to support the training and formation of priests throughout the diocese.

"This fund will make it possible long into the future for us to provide appropriate training for newly ordained clergy," said the bishop. "We will keep building it all through this anniversary year—and beyond—because it

is something that truly benefits the whole diocese."

The vision of the anniversary fund is to better equip newly ordained clergy who would benefit by working alongside seasoned priests allowing for a focused time of apprenticeship, also known as a curacy. Not all parishes can afford a second priest, so the hope of Bishop Bell is to provide parishes with financial support to underwrite the costs of training and forming new priests in a variety of



Bishop Susan announces the Curacy Fund at the Anniversary dinner. Photo: Dani Leitis

ministry contexts, typically over a two-year period.

"When your parish needs a new priest, with your help, I'll be able much more easily to provide one who is formed and supported by the donations of many," stated Bishop Bell in her charge to Synod. "That's our Anglican Church at its best!"

Canon Drew MacDonald, stewardship and campaign advisor, agreed, observing that this diocesan initiative will be a blessing to the Church for

generations.

"We will welcome, honour, and celebrate all contributions; I might suggest a gift of \$150, or perhaps \$1,500 in keeping with the 150th anniversary of the Diocese of Niagara," said Canon MacDonald. "Maybe some might even consider a monthly pre-authorized gift of fifteen dollars a month or even \$150 or a larger legacy gift."

During the Synod, Bishop Bell reported that she was already "deeply humbled by a legacy gift

a quarter of a million dollars toward this new Curacy Fund made in our anniversary year."

Equipping right skilled and well-formed spiritual leaders has been a key priority for the bishop. "It'll be here long after we're all gone to ensure that parishes receive the best formed priests we can muster."

If you would like to make a legacy gift to this fund, or to the diocese in general, please be in touch with Canon Drew MacDonald at drew.macdonald@niagaraanglican.ca.



Scan this QR code to donate online to the Curacy Fund today.

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Holiday Help Program: Helping Families and Seniors Thrive this Season

ALICIA PAYNE

The Holiday Hope program at St. Matthew's House supports families with children under 17 and seniors over 55 who live in lower city Hamilton (Wards 1-5), matching them with individual sponsors, families, or groups looking for a meaningful way to give back to their community during the holiday season.

The Holiday Hope program has been operating for over 35 years, thanks to generous donations from parishes, organizations, and individuals who see the impact that this program has on families and seniors in our community. In 2023, we served 431 families, 412 seniors, and 17 emergency appointments. Our ability to continue to serve the community next holiday season will only be possible with ongoing enthusiasm and support from generous supporters like you.

By matching sponsors with wish lists given by families in the program, our Holiday Hope Program provides new clothes, toys/household items, and grocery gift cards to these

families and the older adults of the program. Grocery gift cards are purchased to ensure that the people we serve will be able to purchase enough food for the holiday season. Our program also holds emergency appointments on Christmas Eve, for any families who did not get a chance to register.

Starting in October, families and older adults register for Holiday Hope, including a phone appointment to share their specific needs for the holiday season. We take this time to learn more about their unique situations, including details about their need for clothes, toys, household items, and where they can shop for groceries. We connect participating sponsors, and together we ensure each senior or family receives a hamper of items they need by the week before Christmas.

On Christmas Eve we hold emergency appointments that allow anyone who did not get a chance to register to come in and we can put together a hamper for them on the spot. Having extra grocery gift cards ensures

that they can get groceries for over the holidays, a time when most food banks are closed.

Our measure of success with this program is ensuring



ing that every family or older person who reaches out to us for help can receive the support they need over the Holidays. However, we know that there are many more in our community who need this critical support. We want to continue to bring the warmth and magic

of the season to more families and older individuals, who are dealing with the burdens of food insecurity, the demands of the colder months of the year, and

each step forward to donate for a family or a senior. There are so many inspiring stories from our partners—from toy drives to cash donations, and we would not be able to have this program without our sponsors!

We appreciate all the individuals, groups, teams, clubs, and parishes that come together to make our Holiday Hope Program a success. Every year, we are overwhelmed with families and older adults reaching out to us for help; however, the needs of our families and older persons continue to rise. With your support we can extend our reach and support to even more families and older individuals this holiday season, making a magical memory for each and every one of them.

To learn more about the Holiday Hope program and to become a sponsor, please visit us at: <https://stmatthewshouse.ca/holiday-hope/>

Alicia Payne is the Development Manager and Executive Coordinator for St. Matthew's House.

Cathedral Overflows with Faith



On Sunday, October 27, 49 candidates came to Christ's Church Cathedral to be confirmed, received, or to reaffirm their faith. Confirmation is a marker for one's Christian journey. It is the rite by which a person affirms the faith into which they have been baptized and their intention to live a life of committed discipleship. As part of the liturgy, confirmands, express a mature commitment to Christ and receive strength from the Holy Spirit through prayer and the bishop's laying on of hands. As the candidates go out into the world, we invite your prayers; that they may be filled with the Spirit of our living God as they seek to serve God's mission of love through their diverse vocations.

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Feedback is the Breakfast of Champions



**THE REVEREND CANON
MARTHA TARNIC**

If I had known how bad the email was going to be, I would have opened it more carefully. It was the kind of missive that felt like an explosive going off, with sharp pieces of shrapnel detonating from my computer screen and lodging deeply into my gut and heart. I had asked a friend of mine to read some of my writing, and his commentary was ruthless. I had asked for critique. I felt wounded when he delivered.

"I hope he was at least nice about it?" another friend asked me as I wept to her of my hurt feelings.

It was a clarifying question. "No, he wasn't nice at all," I said. "He was direct and honest." I couldn't fault him for doing what I asked of him. "Nice" hadn't been the assignment. I thought of all the times I have shared my writing with readers, looking for feedback, only to receive faint praise or, even worse, a ghosting. Many people live by the pithy advice that saying nothing is the better choice when "nice" doesn't feel possible. But this is writing that I hope to have published. Faint praise and cowardly politeness weren't going to help me. Ghosting might feel nicer, but it creates a lasting cruelty. His words were hard to receive, and I am still nursing some hurt feelings and broken dreams. I also have insight and perspective

that I could not generate on my own which will make my writing better.

This past month I had the privilege of interviewing Mike Cosper for the podcast I co-host, *Future Christian*. Cosper was the voice of Christianity Today's groundbreaking podcast *The Rise and Fall of Mars Hill*. The podcast explores the leadership of the church's founder, Mark Driscoll, and identifies how the seeds of his and the community's destruction were planted from the start. Through meticulous research and interviews, he analyzes the grace and harm individuals across the community experienced through their participation in the success and scandal attached to Driscoll.

Cosper's new book, *The Church in Dark Times*, delves more deeply into the dynamics behind the collapse of one of America's most infamous megachurches. He looks at one central incident in Mars Hill's life. When the church was in its period of rapid expansion, two of the church's elders were fired and excommunicated for having raised valid concerns about the proposed governance structure. It was a harbinger of things to come; Driscoll's unfettered and increasingly toxic authority and the deputizing of other leaders in the community to cover up his wrong-doings and to silence those who raised opposition. Cosper asks the question, "How did all of these faithful people support this kind of wrongdoing?"

What he discovers is of critical importance. It wasn't that Driscoll's supporters weren't aware of his bullying ways. It wasn't that they thought that silencing critics was the right thing to do either. Instead, they came to believe that the success of Mars Hill justified doing some wrong things and supporting a very toxic leader. They bought in so fully to the importance of the



Image: iStock.com/fizkes

institution that they were building, that they came to agree that any voice speaking in opposition to that institutional vision, even in constructive and faithful ways, had to be excised.

The Mars Hill podcast and Cosper's book, *The Church in Dark Times*, should be mandatory listening/reading for anyone in church leadership. Much of the American megachurch culture it describes is foreign to Canadian Anglicans, particularly the enormity of the platforms that celebrity pastors like Driscoll generate. Yet the dynamics described apply to us too, even if smaller in scope. Our churches can also be very personality driven. We, too, can experience the Messiah complex, the weight of expectation that we will have the thing that will save the church. We are all swimming in the rising waters of secularism, facing diminishing numbers across the institutional church in all denominations, and serving in systems that can easily be consumed with anxiety for their survival. We make decisions, on the parish and diocesan level, about how we view critical voices, and when the thing that we're trying to build feels important and fragile, we can conclude that opposing voices are threatening rather than necessary for faithful discernment.

I interviewed another guest on *Future Christian* a number of months ago. The Reverend Rob Hurkmans will be well-known to many in Niagara. He is now the rector of Trinity Streetsville. Twenty years into ordained min-

istry, he noted that his attitude about Christian leadership has changed dramatically. He used to believe that what was needed was a strong visionary leader who would lead the charge into the church's future. What he has found, however, is that the religious landscape in which we are operating is changing so rapidly that the future configuration of the church is ultimately unknowable. What we must do is figure this out, with much fear and trembling, together. "I have found out that the smartest voice in the room is the room," he said.

Thankfully, the promise to the church is that where two or three gather together, Christ is in our midst. We're going to need that promise because we all know something about how criticism can feel like shrapnel and because the Mars Hill saga serves as a warning against that all-too-easy impulse to chop off the head of dissenting voices to warn trespassers. We can easily make the mistake of imagining we can be healthy—individually or collectively—by getting rid of opposition, when in fact, we are sewing the seeds of our destruction.

The church's historical record tells us that the church has routinely been a contested space, that uniformity across Christians in how they view Jesus and what that means for our communal life is non-existent. That doesn't mean critical voices don't hurt, particularly when we are trying to offer something to the world—a vision, a plan, a piece of writing—that feels attached to our very souls. It does mean, that God promises to show up in the spaces between our differing perspectives, our vulnerabilities and uncertainties, and our brave offerings. We can lay down our guards and look with expectation for the wisdom God is going to lift up in the hard conversations between us.

Ode to Faith: A Quick Sonnet

NANCY J. COOMBS

Faith, you propel us in shrouded silence
Burning, you vanquish doubt—shadows pivot
Clearing our mind in nighttime's reliance
Morning you wink (meaning "trust me") a lot.

We shall name you our quiet defender
Standing by, valiant and majestic.
Bitter frost chills the chalice of December
Yet you warm it with a glow angelic

Can we define you? Let us seek to try.
We know you are boundless and enduring
Trusting your deep comfort, caressed souls sigh
Our love for you is God's endless mooring.

Though we must finish this missive shortly
Please know we need you indefinitely!

Nancy J. Coombs, Deputy Rector's Warden at St. Jude's Anglican Church in Oakville, ON, is the author of *The Audition: Poems of Longing, Limbo, and Restoration*.

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The Face of the Verger and the Ministry of Welcome

THE REVEREND DEACON SHEILA PLANT

In addition to my role as Parish Deacon at St. Luke's, Burlington, I am also a member of the Church of England Guild of Vergers (CEGV). I have the opportunity to be a verger at weddings that are held at St. Luke's.

So, many may ask the question "What is a Verger?"

The verger's roots lie deep in history and can be traced back through the medieval Church to the New Testament and beyond. The verger today is someone who is committed to serving the Lord through practical ministry in the church. They have primarily ceremonial duties as well as other responsibilities. The verger serves through a special, indeed unique, and time-honoured lay ministry.

The ancient office of Verger has its beginnings in the earliest days of the Christian Church. The vergers today often retain many of the duties their predecessors held. In the fourth and fifth centuries, they came under the heading of "inferior officers of the church." Two of the forerunners were that of housekeeper and doorkeeper. Terms like sexton, bedel, parish constable, and sacristan have all contributed tasks to the duties conducted by the modern-day verger.

Psalm 84 is known as the Verger's Psalm. Verses 1 and 10 "O how lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord, God of Hosts ..." "I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of the unrighteousness." The verger holds one of the oldest established offices within the church. Vergers were found in temples of the Old Testament days as well as in the great churches and cathedrals of medieval times just as they are in the many different worship centres today.

The verger gets their title from the virge—also known

as the rod, staff, mace, or wand which he or she carries in procession before a dignitary of a cathedral or parish church. The verger made a way through the standing congregation of the medieval church. Some examples of early virges still survive—from the wedding of Mary Tudor in 1554 still in use at Winchester Cathedral or the coronation of Elizabeth I in 1559 at Carlisle Cathedral.

In August of 2024, I had the privilege to attend the guild's training conference and retreat held at the beautiful Elim Conference Centre nestled in the Malvern Hills in England. The theme of this year's conference was The Ministry of Welcome. This ministry is something that many parishes have strived to attain in their parishes. The verger is often the first person that newcomers see when they come into our churches; thus, the ministry of welcome often rests on the verger's shoulders.

What are the constituents of a Ministry of Welcome? We make it clear that all are indeed welcome. The welcoming atmosphere may be created

by a warm, well-lit church with essential information about the parish or upcoming service on display and easily accessible. If no vergers are present, then most churches will have a team of greeters. An agreed strategy for welcoming visitors is helpful—sometimes different approaches can confuse newcomers or visitors. For example, if a visitor arrives while a service is in progress then the verger has the responsibility to give a welcome and to inform the visitor of the options—join in with the activity, or sit at the rear for a while to observe and then join in. To force visitors to participate may be the best way to turn them off or away with no hope of return. It is a real turn-off to say, "There is a service in progress" and do not explain options. Likewise, to force them to participate is not good either. They may wish to observe until they feel more comfortable.

The Ministry of Welcome can be quite complex. It involves boundaries and it also makes us look at ways to make our churches safe for all. The Inclusive Church Network in the UK tells us that there are

barriers in society that keep people out and we all need to address this.

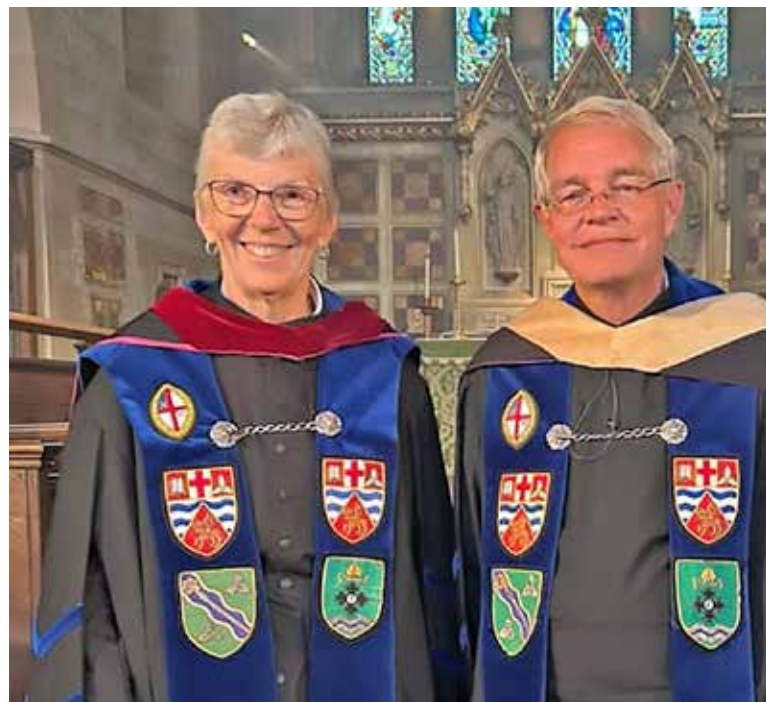
In an inclusive church, there are sights, speech, and services to welcome people in. Signs that people might look for; are there ear defenders for those who have trouble with noise? Are there fidget toys for those who find sitting still an issue? Is there an opportunity or safe place for those who need to do something while listening to the liturgy: for example, knitting etc.? Do they know where the washroom is? These are all things to look at and to provide the invitation to break down barriers. Do we welcome new people to sing, or say the liturgy? This might be a challenge as we see so many people where English may not be their first language. We need to allow people to see themselves in how

we talk to God. Are we gender inclusive? Do we refer to those in our pews as our "siblings"?

In our service, we must concentrate on the inclusion of welcome because everyone has something to offer. Can we invite people to do one of the readings in their own language? Does it matter what colour their shoes are? After all, Jesus wore sandals! We need to encourage them to be part of the service as they are.

There are so many questions around the Ministry of Welcome. However, this ministry needs to be proactive and intentional so that "no one is left standing" Welcome and hospitality should mirror Jesus' way with us. Rowan Williams once said, "Christ is not a dead friend but a living stranger."

Welcome to God, the stranger.



The Reverend Deacon Sheila Plant and Ritchard Taylor from the Diocese of Niagara at the Vergers Guild's training conference and retreat in England.

Photo: contributed by Sheila Plant

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Niagara Anglican Deadlines and Submission Guidelines

Upcoming Deadlines:

- January – November 22
- February – December 23
- March – January 24

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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Poverty Trends 2024: Finding our Place in Systemic Change

Canada's poverty measures are moving in the wrong direction

DEIRDRE PIKE

In the latest *Poverty Trends* report by the Citizens for Public Justice, and the last before the Canada's next federal election, the reader will finish knowing it's not a good news story when it comes to the current direction of poverty measures.

Secondly, readers leave equipped with "information, inspiration, and practical suggestions" to find a place with like-minded people who believe "a better way is possible."

"I don't know how to get



involved," is a common phrase heard in parishes once people are informed, educated, and

want to take action. The report provides tangible actions to ensure new advocates are setting the right goals and using helpful language, all backed up by solid data.

After establishing the poverty rates under different measures for each province and territory in Canada, the report provides both historical and contemporary context for people's experience of poverty, particularly for equity-deserving populations.

The report includes four sets of recommendations that would impact different systems, led

by the income supports system. Implementing a basic income across the country is a top recommendation in this system.

Finally, a very helpful section offers a way for people to determine the best role for them in community action. Using a Venn diagram from Dr. Ayana Elisabeth Johnson, one is asked i) What brings you joy? ii) What needs doing? iii) What are you good at? The cross-section of these answers provides "your action."

With a multi-pronged approach needed to respond

to the complexities of poverty in our communities, everyone is needed with their variety of gifts. Once you take some time with this report, if you're looking for a way to move forward with others, email Deirdre Pike, Program Consultant, Justice and Outreach, Deirdre.pike@niagaraanglican.ca.

This report can be found by visiting the Citizens for Public Justice website <https://cpj.ca/report/poverty-trends-2024/>

Celebrating 50 Years of Bible Study

DIANNE MALLION

On October 6, 2024, the Church of the Ascension, Hamilton, celebrated the 50th anniversary of their Bible Study. It truly was a group and discipleship event consisting of special liturgical music chosen by John Laing, music director; altar flowers given by Ruth Roberts, parishioner, "in memory of those faithful members who attended Bible Study over the last 50 years"; and homemade Scripture cake baked by the hospitality committee. This was served at the friendship hour after the service.

Our guest homilist was John Bowen who spoke on "Why Read the Bible?" He commented that the Church of the Ascension is one of the few Anglican churches that still has an active Bible Study. Bowen shared "that all human beings need a story to live by. For Christians, that is the Bible." He compared the Bible to a six-act play. Act 1 is the Creation and Act 6 is the end of the story "where God wraps it up." The hero is Jesus being "the agent of creation, judgment, and the new world."

And so, the Bible and the study of it remain an important



part of worship at the Church of the Ascension to this day. Archdeacon Bill Sewell started Bible Study as a way to begin planning for a parish mission. The group met on Wednesday

evenings. It was around the 10-year mark that Canon Paul Jackson suggested that Bible Study meet on Tuesday mornings with Will Thwaites as coordinator. We give thanks to

God that Will is still facilitating Bible Study to this day and still on Tuesday mornings. Stan Bowers also facilitated a group on Wednesday evenings.

As with the tides that ebb and flow, so too has participation in Bible Study progressed. We give thanks, over the 50 years, for the faithful leadership of Will Thwaites, Stan Bowers, Dennis, and the late Mary Goldsberry.

We continue to be challenged, inspired, and in awe of "The Good News". May it continue.

Human Trafficking in Niagara Awareness Workshop Presented

On Saturday, October 26, Human Trafficking Justice Niagara hosted an awareness workshop called Human Trafficking? Not in my Backyard! This workshop was a four-hour workshop covering the realities of the human trafficking that is indeed

occurring in our own backyard.

The Diocese of Niagara is located in a prime area for human trafficking due to its proximity to the 401 corridor and the American border, making this a key justice issue for the area.

Wendy Saunders, the new chairperson for Human Trafficking Justice Niagara, opened the workshop with a territorial acknowledgment. Presenters included Dean Tim Dobbins, Detective Kyle Jarvie from the Hamilton Police

Service, and Jen Lucking, executive director of Restoration House and Nancy's Place in Burlington.

Participants also heard from Jennifer Richardson, Ontario's first director of the provincial Anti-Human Trafficking Office

and Strategy and a survivor of human trafficking. Members of local groups such as Zonta Club 1 and the Rainbow Kings and Queens, learned how we can use prayer, education, action, and advocacy to change this societal plague.

Since 2021, Canada has observed February 22 as Human Trafficking Awareness Day to encourage all Canadians to "raise awareness of the magnitude of modern day slavery in Canada and abroad and to take steps to combat human trafficking."

To learn more about how you can help please contact Deirdre Pike, diocesan program consultant for justice and outreach at deirdre.pike@niagaraanglican.ca.



Members of Zonta Club 1 and Rainbow Kings and Queens were in attendance.



Detective Kyle Jarvie of the Hamilton Police Vice & Human Trafficking Unit spoke.

Photos: Deirdre Pike