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‘Pity the innocents’ | Church leaders urge focus on plight of Holy Land civilians

Sean Frankling
STAFF WRITER

Leaders in the international Anglican Communion and the Anglican Church of Canada released messages of lament and calls for compassion after the renewal of violence in the Holy Land this fall. Meanwhile, sources with close ties to the region and its struggles spoke with the *Journal* about where they see hope for eventual peace there.

Canon Richard LeSueur is host of *The Fifth Gospel*, a video series on the Holy Land and former dean and lecturer at St. George’s College in Jerusalem. He has also served on the advisory council of the Companions of Jerusalem, a group of Canadian Anglicans formed to raise awareness of the Episcopal diocese of Jerusalem and act for peace in the Holy Land.

LeSueur told the *Journal* concerned Christians should pray for the region’s peacemakers—even though their efforts are unlikely to bear fruit in the near term.

“Pray for the peacemakers. That’s who Jesus named as blessed, and that’s who we need,” LeSueur said as war between Israel and Hamas, the group governing the Gaza Strip, began, spurred by a cross-border attack by Hamas militants Oct. 7. “That’s

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PHOTO: OHAMMED AL-MASRI/REUTERS

A girl walks through the scorched courtyard of the Al-Ahli Arab Hospital, a PWRDF partner operated by the Episcopal diocese of Jerusalem and site of a deadly Oct. 17 explosion variously blamed on the Israel Defense Forces and Palestinian militants.



HEARING THE LAMBETH CALLS ▶

Science and Faith
Tenth of a 10-part series on the calls to the global Anglican Communion made at the 2022 Lambeth Conference

‘Science is a God-given resource’

Global crises underscore mutual importance of science and faith, say members of Anglican Communion Science Commission

Matthew Puddister
STAFF WRITER

Anglican bishops made an emphatic declaration when they gathered for the 2022 Lambeth Conference: “the perception of a rift between science and faith should be laid to rest in every part of our Anglican Communion over the coming critical decade.”

The perceived gap between science and faith, says the bishops’ statement—one of ten calls they made to Anglicans worldwide—shows itself in a lack of mutual engagement. “Often scientists have not been affirmed in their vocation as disciples and church leaders have not felt confident in bringing the wisdom of faith to scientific questions,” it states.

The call repeatedly refers to science

as possessing “God-given resources for the life of faith.” Anglicans, it says, can evangelize “by removing it as a barrier to proclamation and belief” and by drawing on science as inspiration for their worship. The call asks Anglicans to “enter into theological dialogue with science” and to grow in their own understanding of science as an integral part of Christian discipleship. It urges seminaries and training programs to do likewise, modelling “how the wisdom of faith can be offered to the work of science”; and for every church of the communion to establish a lead bishop for science.

The Lambeth Conference also saw the formal launch of the Anglican Communion Science Commission (ACSC), comprising scientists, church

leaders and theologians from across the Communion with a mandate to lead work related to the call.

Bishop of Rupert’s Land Geoffrey Woodcroft, the Anglican Church of Canada’s representative on the ACSC, says all of the Lambeth calls “speak directly into discipleship.” For the call on science and faith, he pointed to floods, droughts and fires in Canada that have been linked to climate change.

“We think as a people of Canada that we’re at a loss for what to do,” Woodcroft says. “And yet the calls and scientific study have shown we actually have a great amount to do, particularly in education and in local action. How about we don’t drive so much? How about we recycle,

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“Let's face it: If we want an inspiring talk about a worthwhile project, we can definitely get that at the Rotary Club. And they probably do a better lunch.”

—Canon Judy Paulsen, professor, Wycliffe College

Gentle outreach, deep questions

Church leaders reflect on what it takes to rebuild public trust

Sean Frankling

STAFF WRITER

About 150 students come to the multifaith centre on University of Victoria Campus Wednesday afternoons—but not for a religious service, says the Rev. Ruth Dantzer, the school's Anglican spiritual care provider.

Instead, they're coming for a pet café, which invites students to de-stress with therapy animals. In a climate where many students have no familiarity with or are actively suspicious of religious institutions, Dantzer says she felt it was important to simply provide a source of support for stressed and homesick students.

And as a result, “what happened was all these students who would never normally set foot in a building called the ‘Multi-Faith Centre’ come for the pet café,” she says. Having made the crucial first steps past the threshold, they can see posters for the other services and ministries the centre offers, which they might not otherwise have heard of. “Programs are more well attended because of exposure from this one that has seemingly nothing to do with religion or spirituality,” Dantzer says.

The pet café is one example of how Anglican leaders are trying to build public trust in the church at a time when evangelism is often perceived as predatory. According to some, that trust may take a long time and a gentle approach to rebuild—and it won't succeed without deep reflection on the life-and-death questions that make the gospels worth sharing to begin with.

Before Anglicans can even begin to think about getting people interested in coming into church on Sunday, they need to think about building trust and relationship with people in their communities, says Canon Judy Paulsen, a professor of evangelism at the University of Toronto's Wycliffe College.

“These people aren't waking up on Sunday thinking about where they can get a good sermon—they're more likely to think about where they can get a good brunch,” she says, but that doesn't mean they don't have spiritual needs, struggles and questions that the church can address. And before those can be addressed, she says, the church has to first find out who their neighbours are and what questions and needs they have. And the neighbours have to meet someone from the church in an environment they're comfortable with.

“Do we love the world that God loves? Do we love these people [who we] usually don't even know yet? If we haven't asked their opinion, we don't know what troubles them.”

That's exactly where events like UVic's pet café come in, Paulsen says. Putting on a pet café or a block party, even taking out a booth at the local fair with a dunk tank are all ways the church can connect with people without making them feel like they're being sold something. In addition to making low-pressure connections with the community, they offer a chance for clergy and other Christians at these events to show they don't match some of the worst stereotypes in the public consciousness—ideas they've formed



▲ University of Victoria students gather for a pet cafe run by spiritual care providers at the campus's multifaith centre.

PHOTO: UNIVERSITY OF VICTORIA MULTIFAITH CENTRE

from news stories about sexual abuse in the church or footage of extremists calling themselves Christians while waving “You're going to hell” signs.

“Show them a public face of the church that is outside the walls of the building and show them that we're also people who love our kids and love to have fun,” she says. “With this first threshold ... we're just hoping they get to the place where they say Christians are okay.”

Another area of success at UVic, Dantzer says, has been outreach to the students through social justice issues. By showing up as a spiritual care provider wearing a priest's collar at a climate march or a truth and reconciliation event, she says, the reaction she most often gets is surprise.

This is often followed by curiosity: “Well, hey, wait a minute. I have this judgement, this generalization or stereotype, about Christians or Christian leaders. And you're not meeting that right now by speaking up in that way ... So what is it you believe?” is a common reaction.

The other vital part of her campus ministry is outreach to the school's LGBTQ students, says Dantzer, through the creation of its Inclusive Christian Club. By making an intentional effort to reach out and welcome this group, who have so often felt unwelcome, marginalized or rejected by Christian leadership in the past, she says, she and the other spiritual care providers involved have regained some lost trust.

“It's word of mouth from folks in the 2SLGBTQIA+ community like, ‘These people are legit. They mean what they

say and they're doing the real work of inclusion,’” she says.

Thanks in part to its outreach efforts, Dantzer says, the core ministries of Christian spiritual care at UVic such as the campus communion service have seen a modest but significant increase in attendance over the past seven years. The emphasis on meeting people where they are and letting them bring their own questions to the table has been a success with students who are used to seeing church authority as strictly hierarchical, she says. But she stresses that for her, it's the process of transforming the shape of outreach, not the results, that constitutes real success.

Not all community outreach needs to be based on social justice issues, of course. Dantzer notes that her strategies are specifically tailored to the concerns and priorities of the students she serves. Paulsen recommends parishes look around at their communities, find out what people are looking for and use that as a point of connection to fill a need. She gives examples of churches using their space as a study hall for students after school, running parenting programs or offering marriage preparation courses for young couples.

Still, some church experts caution that placing too many hopes on outreach to reverse the trend of shrinkage mainline denominations have been facing may be a set-up for disappointment.

The Rev. Ephraim Radner, a recently-retired professor of theology at Wycliffe, believes there is no magic recipe for successful outreach unless the church addresses the more fundamental source of broken trust. He echoes Dantzer's observation that hierarchical institutions in general are the subjects of deep distrust in current culture. In that context he says, there's a limit to what efforts to clean up the church's image can do to make it more attractive than any other institution with a social justice platform and a promise to do better. In fact, he says, in the church's case, its broken promises come in the context of a claim to represent the love and authority of God.

So when people who feel alienated from the church consider their hurt, he says, it's not just anger they feel. “It's disappointment. It's the kind of broken trust that goes into the deepest relationships that are fractured: your friend who has betrayed you, your parent who has harmed you.”

As such, he says, the great challenge for the church is to become a people of integrity that does what it says and faithfully represents God's message and goodness. While humility and gentle outreach may be helpful parts of the equation, he says, there is also a risk of focusing on them and on matching popular social justice issues to the exclusion of what makes the church uniquely valuable to its parishioners. Otherwise, he says, the effort to clean up the church's image “isn't going to make the church any more attractive than a well-functioning government office or school board or a corporate enterprise or sports team or wherever all the things are that

See BUILDING, p.3



PHOTO: UNIVERSITY OF VICTORIA MULTIFAITH CENTRE

Dantzer says UVic's pet cafe is a way to make contact with students without making them feel they're being sold something.

Building relationships out of love of God and people

Continued from p. 2
people are going to do."

Radner describes himself as less optimistic that a change in the approach to evangelism is going to improve Sunday attendance. Instead, he says, it's vital that the church focus on the things it does provide: what it has to say about life, death and the experience of being human.

Radner worries those vital aspects of religion lose their centrality when people aim at being palatable first.

"I've taught in the seminaries, I've [worked on] forming, if you will, leaders of the church for some years. And I remain puzzled that this notion that the church has a message that goes to the heart of everybody's existence—not just a given social problem, but the heart of everybody's existence from birth to death and beyond—that this notion actually is not well ordered in the minds of our young clergy, let alone older clergy."

What they can't afford to do is simply fall back on tropes and platitudes, whether those are the evangelical standbys like "accepting Jesus as your lord and saviour" or the more recent invitations to do justice. These are easy to articulate, but ultimately impersonal, he says. Similarly, Paulsen argues that even meaningful community outreach like Christmas dinners for people without a family to spend it with aren't much good unless parishioners, clergy and everyone involved in any form of outreach keeps a clear view of why the work matters from a Christian perspective.

"We need to be putting some of what we're saying in such a way that there is

greater clarity about what is at our core, because let's face it: If we want an inspiring talk about a worthwhile project, we can definitely get that at the Rotary Club. And they probably do a better lunch."

For her part, Dantzer says she delves more deeply into the big issues Christianity deals with with students who sign up for one-on-one spiritual companionship sessions, having decided they were interested based on their initial encounters. And for some churches, Paulsen says, following Dantzer's example on showing up to support social justice causes works well as a way to draw in interest to those deeper questions. The church certainly has much to say on climate change, based on its beliefs about the Fall and its effects on humanity's alienation from the created world. Many people might not even have been aware there were affirming congregations they could join, she says.

But whatever methods of outreach they use, churches must choose them through a process of deep prayer, meditation and listening not just to what their communities need from them but what God is asking of them.

"Those things will help us attend to what it is that God has for us to do in that particular place," she says. "We need to be asking ourselves, are we building relationship out of our love for God and our love for the people around us? If we are, then I actually think evangelism is something that is more or less going to happen much more naturally than it has in the past." ■



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Unexpected loves

Hallmark Christmas movies don't have much to do with Christmas. Or do they?

By Peter Elliott



HAVE YOU EVER watched a Hallmark Christmas movie? We began watching them ironically. I mean, how terrible could they be? And it turned out, they could be pretty awful. But after a while they became like salty snack food—popcorn or chips: We couldn't resist watching just one more.

Hallmark Media has announced it will release 40 new Christmas movies in 2023. Since 2009, Hallmark, traditionally known for making greeting cards, has aired more than 300 of these films—and a handful of Hanukkah movies too. These movies are profitable: During the Christmas season, according to ratings, more than 80 million people watch at least a few minutes of a Hallmark movie, and they're particularly popular with the advertiser-friendly demographic of women 18-54. There's a Canadian connection, too. Most of these movies are shot in Canada, where tax credits make production less expensive.

Formulaic to a fault, these movies, set at Christmastime, tell pretty much the same story using tropes to create feel-good experiences. A typical plot goes like this: A 30-something career woman, stressed out by her executive job in a large North American city, and with a less than satisfactory romantic life, leaves the big city for Christmas, returning to her roots in some small town where she reconnects with a high school sweetheart. He's single again (sometimes a widower, sometimes divorced) and raising a child. Usually, it's unexpected circumstances that lead to their meeting up, and as they spend more time together, doing Christmas things—like choosing a Christmas tree, or going to the town square for a tree-lighting ceremony or participating in a cookie-decorating workshop with his child—they fall in love. Then there's a complicating factor almost breaking them apart, but after three kisses (an “almost” kiss, a private kiss and then a public one)—snow falling and carollers singing in the background—Christmas has arrived. There's new love and new life; and the credits roll. You have to wonder why these stories engage such a large audience. Is it because these movies feed a nostalgic longing for a simpler, gentler world? This they do with nary a reference to the nativity of Christ, nor to the mystery of the Incarnation. Sure, a Christmas carol is sometimes included but for the most part these are secular, not religious, films.

What happened? Isn't Christmas a church festival? There have always been Christmas films in which the gospel story isn't in the spotlight, like *White Christmas*



▲ **Hallmark Christmas movies, like this stock photo, portray young couples in love amid conventional seasonal tropes.**

IMAGE: 4PM PRODUCTION

and *It's a Wonderful Life*. But they've tended to be built around some sort of arguably Christian theme—a celebration, for example, of ‘the Christmas spirit.’

In churches across this country the institutional decline of mainline religion has affected even Christmas attendance, with some notable exceptions. Canadian Anglican statistics show, at best, a plateauing of attendance numbers—Christmas isn't, for churches, what it once was. Understandably many long-time faithful Anglicans are nostalgic, wishing to return a time when Christmas meant full churches and the sense that, on Christmas Eve, the world stood still while the birth of the Christ child was celebrated.

This is an interesting pair of nostalgias, because while there's little that the church can do to influence the plots of Hallmark Christmas movies, they do open up an evangelical space. There's a longing in them for more than just an idealized past but also for the best things offered in the Christian story—things that can address the themes that fill these romcoms, like the stress of life in postmodern society, with all its complexities, or the desire for deeper, truer connection.

Then there's the theme of finding love in unexpected places—probably

the predominant theme of Hallmark Christmas movies. Is this not the theme of the Christian story too?

In the Christmas of the gospels it's God that shows up, incognito, as a baby in a manger, to young parents in stressful circumstances, in a Holy Land rocked with violence and fear. Sure, there's no tree lighting ceremony in the nativity narratives, nor hot chocolate; but there are, as it were, three kisses. There's the “almost” kiss of the eternal God bending close to earth at the annunciation of Mary; the private kiss of a mother upon her newborn son; and the public kiss of the divine in the songs of the angels and the worship of the shepherds and the magi. For a moment, on that first silent night, heaven and earth became one, the divine was revealed in human form and a new possibility for life was revealed.

With a little creativity and imagination, perhaps churches can learn to better recognize and feed the yearning of so many for this new possibility, and for a boundless and unexpected love. ■

Peter Elliott is a consultant and coach in private practice. He is a former dean of Christ Church Cathedral Vancouver and his ministry has included work with General Synod and the dioceses of Toronto and Niagara.

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SINGING WITH JOY ▶



Harbingers of hope in a strife-torn world

By Linda Nicholls

THE OUTBREAK of war in the Holy Land began with the horrific attack by Hamas on civilians in Israel and escalated to an attack on—and, later, a deadly explosion at—the Anglican Al-Ahli Arab Hospital in Gaza. Since then, I have found myself pondering the paradoxes of daily life. On the one hand I begin my day listening to the radio news of disaster upon disaster, in the Holy Land and elsewhere—more bombs dropped; more civilians killed; more vitriolic anger poured out; another earthquake; a burst dam that makes thousands homeless. The enormity of the pain and suffering that I can read, see or hear about instantaneously is overwhelming. Even as I listen I realize how helpless I am in the face of so much brokenness.

Then I hear a piece of music that captures a moment of joy or hope, or I glance out the window and am mesmerized by the beauty of the sunset over my deck—or the sight of a new bloom on my hibiscus! My heart is softened by that reminder that there is still hope, still joy possible—still God’s creative hand at work in the world.

We have all had moments of delight in the midst of the darkest hours of our days: the sudden smile of a small infant; a gift of kindness from a stranger; an example of love that goes above and beyond



IMAGE: HAPPY SLOTH

expectations. Suffering and joy exist side by side.

Advent is the season of anticipation in which we long for the kingdom of God to come in its fulness of peace and justice—even as we celebrate the birth of a baby who is at the mercy of political and social forces that will make him a refugee for his first two years of life. Yet that child will change the course of history and become a sign of hope for us all. That is why we cherish this season of our church year. We

need, every year, to be reminded that God’s hope is born in the smallest and the least. It is born in the love of God poured out in simple kindness, generosity, courage and compassion. It is born in a young woman willing to bring God into the world—and a fiancé willing to face social stigma to be faithful.

Over the past two years I have visited parts of our church that are in isolated communities far away from the cities of southern Canada—in northern Saskatchewan, northwestern British Columbia and the Yukon—and recently in Labrador, including Rigolet (population 300), the southernmost Inuit community in the world. In these places I have been moved by the faithfulness of small Anglican congregations living the gospel, raising up local leadership, sharing their resources with others and caring for community needs. I have been touched by the faithfulness of Indigenous parishes whose love of God transcends the pain of history and abuse. In the midst of powerful social shifts, communities and families find a way to be the light of Christ!

As we enter this Advent amidst the cacophony of war and suffering, faithful prayer and acts of love and kindness continue to be harbingers of hope. Thanks be to God. ■

Archbishop Linda Nicholls is the primate of the Anglican Church of Canada.

FEATHER AND SAGE ▶



PHOTO: WICHAJ BOPATAY

On sharing the gifts of our time—and ourselves

By Chris Harper

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven.
Ecclesiastes 3:1

TIME AND SEASON are constants in the sea of change before us. Our shared journey brings us constantly into new experiences and ever-evolving realities that challenge and shape us. As human beings we like and ever gravitate toward that which we might be able to imaginatively or physically anchor to. We invest in home and comforts, we put away for the time of retirement, we might even invest in markets hoping that the right investment will yield the right return ... But do we think to invest in time and season?

Time is a gift given to us by God. The 24 hours we call a day is time to do all that

we have to, even though most of us say that there are not enough hours in a day! But how do we invest in a day, this gift from the Almighty? Do we love and forgive those around us or those who cross our path in the journey of life? Do we offer service and gifts of our time and ourselves to others through visitation, communication or presence? Do we give back to God in prayer, our personal ministry or quiet time listening to God through the seasons before us? Do we invest in our time wisely, making the best and of the time before us? I often think of the time that I had with family members and close friends now gone. If I only had a few minutes more with them I would thank them for the time they gave me. I wish I’d had more of it, and my prayers of thanksgiving fall short of fully expressing my gratitude for the time I was blessed with them. Time we share with someone is an investment in them, a

sharing of the blessing of God.

As the seasons change, we’re reminded that the Almighty is in all seasons shaping and reshaping, constantly growing and renewing Creation. Do we invest in the seasons of our time and seek to change, evolve, grow and be renewed? Or do we withhold, hinder or restrict? I’m constantly reminded to seek the beauty in every day and season, especially in the seasons of my life and of those around me. Every moment is precious and not a second should be wasted. So let’s be more conscious about how we invest our gifts and blessings and use our time wisely. Since time and season belong to God, we should also give back to God through our blessings to others and the world around us. ■

Archbishop Chris Harper is national Indigenous archbishop of the Anglican Church of Canada.

Anglicans called to close science-faith ‘rift’

Each can enrich the other, Lambeth bishops say

Continued from p. 1

reuse, we compost, we build green spaces and maintain them—in church speak, as sacred; in cultural speak, as absolutely necessary?”

Bishop of Oxford Steven Croft, ACSC co-chair, describes the Lambeth call on science and faith as “a response to the huge existential crises facing the world in climate and disease and use of technology for the future ... This is a decade in which the church needs to be literate in its approach to science and also needs to be able to speak from our own Christian faith and tradition into scientific work in each of those three areas and indeed others.”

Other ACSC members share the view that science need not be seen as a threat to faith, including Andrew Briggs, professor of nanomaterials at the University of Oxford and ACSC commissioner. But Briggs takes issue with the Lambeth bishops’ call for “theological dialogue” between science and faith. It’s not entirely accurate to speak of dialogue between them, he says, since they are different systems of knowledge.

“I understand what people mean when they talk about a dialogue,” he says. “But it runs the risk of setting off people’s thinking in an unhelpful direction ... For the follower of Jesus Christ whose mind is scientific, science is not really something that dialogues with their faith. It’s an outworking of their faith. That includes the curiosity that drives the discoveries in science and it also includes the values that drive the responsible use of science.

“Both science at its best and theology at its best care passionately about the truth,” Briggs adds. “They’re passionately seeking descriptions of what can truthfully be said about the material world and what can truthfully be said about God. If this is God’s creation, which I believe it is, then I don’t see how anything you could learn about it could conflict with anything that can truthfully be said about God.”

“I’ve always passionately believed that science is a ‘God-given resource for the life of faith,’ the work of the church,” he adds, echoing the words of the Lambeth call. “I also care that people of faith should speak courageously and confidently about the uses of science and the technologies that arise from science.”

Woodcroft recalls an event known as Evolution Sunday from his time as parish priest at St. Paul’s Anglican Church, Fort Garry in Winnipeg. On Evolution Sundays, he would invite a scientist to speak to the congregation—and one scientist, he says, illustrated with a particularly concrete example the different roles played by science and faith.

Woodcroft recounts one scientist who finished his talk by holding up a rock and looking at the parishioners. “He said, ‘Science has taught me that if I drop this rock right now, it will land on my foot and hurt me. That’s gravity, the theory of gravity.’ Then he looks at us again and he says, ‘Religion taught me not to throw it at you.’”

Historically, theological dialogue between science and faith has often focused on questions of biblical literalism,

▶ “If this is God’s creation ... then I don’t see how anything you could learn about it could conflict with anything that can truthfully be said about God,” Briggs says.

PHOTO: CONTRIBUTED

“For the most part, Anglicans recognize that God’s gift of thought and exploration is a gift to be welcomed and brought into dialogue with Scripture.”

—Archbishop Linda Nicholls

such as the 1925 Scopes trial in Tennessee that revolved around the teaching of evolution in schools. ACSC members who spoke to the *Anglican Journal*, however, said no such obstacles presented themselves in discussion of science within the Anglican Communion.

“The obstacles that we usually see are where a literal interpretation of scripture or a fundamentalist interpretation of Scripture can lead to an outright rejection of a scientific truth,” says Archbishop Linda Nicholls, primate of the Anglican Church of Canada and ACSC commissioner.

“That is not usually where the Canadian Anglican church finds itself. It’s not to say there aren’t people who struggle with some of [these questions], but for the most part, Anglicans recognize that God’s gift of thought and exploration is a gift to be welcomed and brought into dialogue with scripture.”

Climate change, COVID-19, artificial intelligence in focus

ACSC members describe broad enthusiasm for the Lambeth call on science from bishops across the Communion with a focus on practical issues, three in particular: climate change, COVID-19 and artificial intelligence (AI).

“We haven’t encountered obstacles,” Croft says. “I think because of the place of these three great crises in the life of the world and the role of science within them, there’s general agreement that we need to do work in this area, though less agreement perhaps on what that work might involve.”

Anglicans have increasingly highlighted the need to tackle climate change. At the Lambeth Conference, bishops from Bangladesh and Melanesia described the devastating effects of rising sea levels. In Melanesia, Briggs says, crops are increasingly unable to grow because of fertile land being submerged by salt water from the ocean. In that context, he asks, “How do people feed themselves and their families?”

The COVID-19 pandemic, Briggs says, also brought scientific questions to the fore for many Anglican church leaders and members.

“Any bishop who had previously perhaps given not as much thought to science ... was [now] faced with issues of vaccine hesitancy and vaccine inequity ... then with really practical questions like whether you should hold services in person,” he says. “If you don’t hold them

in person, what do you do about holy communion?”

Woodcroft notes that in countries like Brazil, churches took the lead in advocating a pandemic response based on science. In 2021, a Brazilian congressional panel recommended that then-president Jair Bolsonaro be charged with crimes against humanity for his pandemic response—arguing that he intentionally let the virus spread in a failed bid to achieve “herd immunity.” Meanwhile, a conference of Roman Catholic bishops that year urged Brazilians to get vaccinated.

“The Brazilian [government’s] response to COVID-19 was, ‘Don’t worry about it,’” Woodcroft says. “And it was ... pretty much all of the Christian churches that were protecting society, and not the government.”

Briggs says while AI offers significant benefits in areas such as health care and building quantum computers, it also brings potential for harm. He cites the use of AI by social media and data companies, which make money through advertisements and therefore have an economic incentive to maximize the amount of time people spend looking at screens.

“A lot of the public attention is on adolescents and young people and it’s right that they should be protected,” he says. “But actually there’s a lot of adults who don’t have the resilience to cope with the psychological sophistication that the AI applies to their use of their media ... We already do have very significant Christian thought leaders who speak out about those things.”

One area where Anglicans engage in theological dialogue with science, Nicholls says, is in hospitals, where many serving chaplains providing pastoral care must grapple with the ethics of practices like medical assistance in dying (MAID).

Woodcroft agrees. “I believe that science informs us in very positive and hopeful ways to have conversations that are intelligent, fruitful and inclusive of the myriad of voices that are involved,” he says.

At the international level, Croft hopes the ACSC will provide a methodology for the Anglican Communion to engage in theological dialogue with science over the next 10 years. “In this early stage, we are very much in listening mode to try to develop a methodology and discover what will be helpful to different provinces in different places,” he says. ■

“This is a decade in which the church needs to be literate in its approach to science and also needs to be able to speak from our own Christian faith and tradition into scientific work.”

—Bishop Steven Croft

Neurotheology explores religion as activity of the brain

SCIENCE AND FAITH ▶

Understanding how [the] brain mediates religious cognition may be crucial to understanding human beings.

—Patrick McNamara, professor, Boston University

Matthew Puddister
STAFF WRITER

As Anglicans pursue theological dialogue between science and faith through initiatives like the Anglican Communion Science Commission, a growing field of neuroscience is integrating both systems of knowledge by studying how religion affects the brain.

Neurotheology seeks to explain religious beliefs and experiences through the scientific study of neural activity.

Dr. Andrew Newberg, professor and director of research at the Marcus Institute of Integrative Health, Thomas Jefferson University and Hospital, has written numerous books on the subject. He says his interest in the field began in medical school while he was using neuroimaging to study the effects on the brain of conditions such as depression and Alzheimer's disease.

"I said, 'Wait a minute. If we're doing brain scans of people who are depressed or have Alzheimer's ... why can't we do brain scans of people who are meditating and praying?'" he says.

Another scientist studying the effects of religion on the brain is Patrick McNamara, associate professor of neurology at the Boston University School of Medicine. In his research, McNamara has studied the role of the frontal lobes in religious experience, as well as the connection between Parkinson's disease and religiosity.

"Religion is central to human flourishing," McNamara says. "So understanding how [the] brain mediates religious cognition may be crucial to understanding human beings."

In his book *Why God Won't Go Away: Brain Science and the Biology of Belief*, co-written with Eugene D'Aquili and Vince Rause, Newberg identifies two fundamental mechanisms of the brain: trying to keep us alive, which he calls self-maintenance; and learning and adapting to the world, which he calls self-transcendence.

"These are the basic functions of the brain," Newberg told the *Anglican Journal*. "But they are also matching up very well with the basic functions of religion—that religion is there to help us to survive, to help us to understand our world." Religion serves the role of self-transcendence, he says, by helping people connect to a higher power, to understand right and wrong, and to learn how to behave and interact with others. Rituals marking important events, from childbirth to marriage to death, also "help us to transcend ourselves from one point of life to the next."

In addition, Newberg says, many religious rituals and practices such as meditation and prayer help people support themselves. Such practices "help us to cope, to find ways of managing our emotions, managing our behaviours," he says. "In so many ways, religion is a terrific form of self-maintenance."

Neural activity associated with religion is not limited to any single part of the brain or "God spot," Newberg says. Rather, religious experiences engage many different parts of the brain, depending on the religion and the method of worship or prayer. For example, Newberg has studied Franciscan

▲ "When people begin to lose that distinction between the self and the other ... we actually see decreases of activity in the parietal lobe," Newberg says.

PHOTO: ANDRE RYOJI SUGUIMOTO



nuns' centring prayer as a meditative practice, which activated areas of the brain associated with language. By comparison, he says, Buddhist monks approach prayer more as a practice of visualization.

On the other hand, he says, "If you're Christian, if you're meditating on the image of Jesus on the cross, you're going to activate the visual areas of the brain, which is going to be different than if you're repeating the Lord's Prayer ... But maybe both of them give you a feeling of love. The feeling of love might be the same and activate some of the emotional centres of the brain. But how you get there could be very different."

Five elements of spiritual experience

Newberg's latest book *The Varieties of Spiritual Experience*, co-written with David Yaden, details results from a survey of approximately 2,000 people who provided information about their spiritual experiences. While each person's experience is personal and unique, Newberg says, he also discovered commonalities that match well to basic brain functions.

The neuroscientist identifies five core elements to these religious experiences. The first is a sense of unity or connectedness.

"It can be a mild feeling of connection saying, 'Peace be with you' to the people next to you in church before you leave and you just have that sense of community with them," Newberg says. "It could be a powerful, mystical experience where you feel intimately connected to God or becoming one with God in some way." That sense of oneness or unity, he says, is associated with the parietal lobe, which takes sensory information and uses it to create a spatial representation of oneself.

"When people begin to lose that distinction between the self and the other—it could be other members of our community, it could be humanity, it could be the world, it could be God—we actually see decreases of activity in the parietal lobe," Newberg says.

McNamara's research has also found an association between religious experience and a "de-centering of the self," as detailed in his new book *The Cognitive Neuroscience of Religious Experience*. "In general, the self is temporarily decentred so as to arrive at a larger sense of self via ritual and group

membership," McNamara says.

The second core element of religious experiences, Newberg says, is a unique intensity. When people describe profound spiritual experiences, "if they feel love, they don't just feel love. They feel the most amazing sense of love they have ever felt. It was overwhelming, it was infinite ... It could be a feeling of joy ... It could be a sense of understanding." Newberg links these feelings to the limbic system, which are primary emotional drivers of the brain. "They become active when anything important happens to us," he says.

The third element, Newberg says, is a sense of clarity. "There's the feeling of the veil being lifted off of us, that we now understand the world in a way that we never have before." While Newberg says this likely involves many different parts of the brain, he highlights a central region called the thalamus, which brings sensory information into the brain and helps construct perceptions of reality. Studies have documented shifts in the thalamus associated with such experiences, he says.

The fourth core element is a feeling of surrender, of release or letting go. "We see this in a lot of charismatic traditions where the spirit of God just takes you over, so to speak," Newberg says. He believes this feeling is related to the frontal lobe, which becomes active when people purposefully do things.

"Even early in stages of prayer, where you're concentrating on the prayer, where you're repeating the prayer, we see increases of activity in the frontal lobe," Newberg says. "But when the experience starts to kind of take them over, then the person has a drop of activity in the frontal lobe. That seems to be associated with that sense of surrender as part of these experiences."

The fifth core element, Newberg says, is "the transformative element of these experiences. It's something that really changes the person, and they feel that they have something different about them as a result of having this experience ... It's almost as if the brain has been rewired, so to speak." This transformative feeling, he says, likely involves many different parts of the brain.

There are many other potential areas of study in the neuroscience of religion, Newberg says. One is the effect of religious belief on health and vice versa. Newberg says studies from the last 30 years have found in general, people who are religious tend to have lower mortality

See STRESS, p.11

Grieving the Holy Land's 'cycle of violence'

Continued from p. 1

where the imagination, the soulfulness, the Spirit, can speak through those who can rise above and find the solutions that do exist. They're there, but it's not going to be done in a generation."

During his time living in and visiting the Holy Land, he said, he has seen the conditions in Gaza, which he describes as "an incubator of sorrows and suffering."

"What happened [Oct. 7] ... is horrific in every way," he said. "It has to be denounced. It's monstrous. But it's not a surprise." In an ongoing cycle of violence and oppression, he added, "Each takes their turn. Pity the innocents."

LeSueur said it can be difficult to acknowledge the legitimate needs of both peoples without being accused of ignoring the power imbalance or of favoritism in a conflict that tramples on innocent lives on both sides.

In statements posted on their websites, the archbishops of Canterbury and York along with Secretary General of the Anglican Communion Bishop Anthony Poggio condemned the Hamas attacks and called for restraint and reconciliation efforts on both sides. And Archbishop Linda Nicholls, primate of the Anglican Church of Canada, in a joint statement with National Bishop Susan Johnson of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC), grieved the violence and acknowledged both the suffering caused by the attacks and the suffering of Palestinians. They also voiced concern for civilian casualties and acknowledged both Israelis' and Palestinians' rights to safety, security and dignity.

"There's no question that this kind of horrific violence is not a solution to anything," Nicholls said to the *Journal* after the Hamas attack. "And the great tragedy is it just deepens the entrenched hatreds, the entrenched stereotypes, the entrenched everything on all sides."

At the same time, she agreed with LeSueur that it was not surprising that the conditions inside Gaza would result in some Palestinians choosing the path of violence. She wanted to take great care, she said, to be clear she would not endorse violence—regardless of its perpetrators—or the persecution of civilians.

Rabbi Adam Stein, an associate rabbi at Vancouver's Congregation Beth Israel, said he would like to see Christian organizations add more in their statements to repudiate Hamas as a terrorist organization and highlight the severity of their initial attack rather than jumping straight to lecturing Israel about suffering on both sides. He reminded the *Journal* the attack killed more Jewish people than any other since the Holocaust.

But he and LeSueur both believe the best hope for long-term peace in the region is the people already working to bridge the gap between Israeli and Palestinian civilians. Stein recalled his own work leading an interfaith trip for a group of Jews, Christians and Muslims from Australia to the Holy Land, during which they visited Oasis of Peace, a community of Israeli and Palestinian families who live side by side.

It must be difficult, he said, to live in a community like that as tensions rise. The outbreak of war will have set back grassroots and diplomatic efforts alike. Now, he said, the future of a diplomatic negotiation between Israel and Saudi



▲ A man holds a sign for civilians kidnapped by Hamas during a gathering in Tel Aviv, Israel Oct. 19.

PHOTO: COLORMAKER/SHUTTERSTOCK

Arabia which would have offered hope for Israel's relationship with other Arab nations has fallen into doubt. But the fact that it and initiatives like Oasis of Peace exist shows that progress is possible.

"If most of them can continue on after this, then that's where we have hope—and if Jews and Christians, etc., outside of Israel and outside of the Middle East can continue to have dialogue and interactions," he said. "I hope that people can march on with their relationships and the bridge-building that they do."

Jonathan Kuttab, a co-founder of Palestinian human rights group Al-Haq, also believes that violence offers no solutions—especially not when it is directed against civilians. He said the conflict consisted of an oppressive regime on the Israeli side and, on the other, retaliatory violence that serves to confirm the Israeli government's fears and results in redoubled efforts to dominate the territory.

Kuttab said the only hope for peace is for all involved to give up their claims of exclusivity to their territory and find a way to live on the land together. And he insisted that must start with Israel on the side of the conflict with greater resources, funding and military might. But he said he doesn't see how that could happen without serious, forceful pressure from other countries.

"Those who have power and privilege will not easily give it up. They have to be pressured either internally or externally to move towards justice." However, he said, the international community has yet to find a way to exert that pressure without renewing Israel's fears of antisemitic discrimination and causing it to clamp down harder.

At this summer's Assembly, the Anglican Church of Canada and ELCIC's governing bodies each passed a resolution affirming Israel's right to security and self-defense and calling Christians in Canada to oppose antisemitism. The resolution also condemned the Israeli policies of blockading Gaza and occupying East Jerusalem as illegal under international law.

Nicholls stressed that these positions need not be seen as contradictory—that Israel is a legitimate state whose citizens did not deserve the violence of the Hamas

attacks, and that its current policies may be harmful and open to criticism.

In an Oct. 18 open letter to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, Nicholls and Johnson called for Canada to champion humanitarian aid to Gaza following a deadly explosion on the grounds of the Anglican-run Al-Ahli Arab Hospital there the previous day. They highlighted the hospital's history of cancer treatment and care for traumatized children in the region. They urged Canada to call for an immediate cessation of hostilities and the creation of a corridor to bring food, water and medical aid into Gaza.

The Primate's World Relief and Development Fund (PWRDF) announced the same day it would send \$30,000 to the hospital, which is owned and operated by the Episcopal diocese of Jerusalem and is a PWRDF partner. PWRDF also launched an appeal for donations to the hospital.

The Israeli government and the Hamas-led government in Gaza have each blamed their opponents for the explosion at the hospital. Hamas authorities claim the blast was part of the Israeli bombardment, while the Israeli Defense Forces say the blast was caused by an off-target missile fired by Palestinian Islamic Jihad, a paramilitary group. U.S. and Canadian investigations have since backed Israel's version of events. The Gaza health ministry said the incident had claimed 471 lives; an Israeli official, however, told the Reuters news agency the death toll appeared to be several dozen.

Three days earlier, four people were wounded at the same hospital when an Israeli rocket struck and severely damaged its cancer treatment centre, according to the Anglican Communion News Service.

Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby and Archbishop Hossam Naoum, bishop of Jerusalem and primate of Jerusalem and the Middle East, released a joint statement Oct. 24 calling for aid from the international Christian community in the form of prayer, advocacy and financial support for the diocese's ministries in Gaza and Israel.

"When the lives of the innocent are at risk, we strain our eyes for the light of the One who offers healing, peace, and justice. In Gaza, the Al-Ahli hospital, run by the diocese of Jerusalem, is that light," wrote Welby. ■

“ Pray for the peacemakers. That's who Jesus named as blessed, and that's who we need.

—Canon Richard LeSueur

NATIONAL NEWS ▶

Settlement approved in Ralph Rowe class-action lawsuit

Matthew Puddister
STAFF WRITER

An Ontario court has approved a multi-million dollar settlement in the class-action lawsuit against Ralph Rowe, a former Anglican priest and Scout leader convicted of 75 sexual crimes against children in northern Ontario and Manitoba.

Justice Bonnie Warkentin said at an Oct. 27 hearing that she would sign orders that day approving the settlement, which totals \$13.25 million and will provide up to \$350,000 in compensation for each class member abused by Rowe. The settlement also requires the Anglican Church of Canada and Scouts Canada to formally apologize.

“This is a historic day and I am grateful that the courts can offer the opportunity we have to provide some sort of resolution here,” Warkentin said.

The hearing at the Ontario Superior Court of Justice sought to determine whether the proposed settlement was “fair, reasonable and in the best interests” of individuals seeking compensation for sexual abuse committed by Rowe. The abuse took place between 1975 and 1987 within the geographic boundaries of the former Anglican diocese of Keewatin—an area split since 2014



▲ A pre-2014 map shows the former boundaries of the diocese of Keewatin, where Rowe committed his abuse.

PHOTO: ANGLICAN CHURCH OF CANADA

General Synod welcomes settlement as primate consults with Indigenous leaders to make apology

McKay said a formal apology was “very important to the victims of Ralph Rowe, but also to the greater communities where we live.”

‘A huge impact on my life’

The CBC reported McKay spoke to media after approval of the settlement. “I’m just glad it’s over,” McKay said. “The outcome of this has ... played a huge impact on my life, so I hope everything goes well for everybody else. I think we’ll be OK.”

In a statement released the same day, the General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada welcomed the settlement. It noted that in 2017, then General Secretary Archdeacon Michael Thompson said then primate Archbishop Fred Hiltz was committed to apologizing for abuse committed by Rowe while the latter was employed by the church.


“The Church paused its steps towards an apology to avoid commenting on a matter before the courts and has been grateful for the feedback gained from survivors, their Elders and their communities throughout this process about the words and commitments that would be most meaningful to them,” the statement said.

“With the approval of the settlement, See DEPUTY, p.11

between the Indigenous Spiritual Ministry of Mishamikoweesh and the diocese of Rupert’s Land.


Lawyer Jonathan Ptak, a partner at the firm Koskie Minsky LLP which represents the class members, said that there had been no objections to the proposed settlement.

Alvin McKay—a member of Kitchenuhmaykoosib-Inninuwig First Nation who had been sexually assaulted by Rowe at least three times over a two-year period, starting when McKay was five—was also present at the hearing as representative plaintiff in the lawsuit. In an affidavit,




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Stress, religion links probed

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rates, along with higher levels of optimism and feelings of purpose. Not all research suggests religion benefits health. A 2011 Duke University study found greater atrophy in the hippocampus—a part of the brain that plays a major role in learning and memory and which shrinks over time when stress hormones are released—among people who reported a life-changing religious experience (as well as among born-again Protestants and Catholics and those with no religious affiliation). The authors speculated that people in the religious minority or those who struggle with their beliefs might experience higher levels of stress. In a *Scientific American* article about that study, Newberg wrote of other reasons why religious people might experience more stress—if they perceive God to be punishing them or experience conflicting ideas with their religious tradition or family, for example. “Even very positive, life-changing experiences might be difficult to incorporate into the individual’s prevailing religious belief system and this can also lead to stress and anxiety,” he wrote. “Perceived religious transgressions can cause emotional and psychological anguish.” Meanwhile, McNamara’s lab is currently researching how people with Parkinson’s disease use religion

to cope with their illness, and how their religiosity may have changed after their diagnosis. “Religious and spiritual coping strategies appear to be effective for many people with Parkinson’s disease in terms of living well,” he says. Reflecting the approach of integrating science and faith, Newberg says neurotheology offers a powerful tool that can add new perspectives to religious and philosophical questions, such as the existence of free will. “Prior to having neuroscience, if we were going to talk about free will, we’re talking about having a philosophical or theological discussion ... Did God give us free will? It becomes very dogmatic, very based on sacred texts, on great theologians like Aquinas and philosophers like Plato and Aristotle,” Newberg says. “All of those conversations from those perspectives are still in place,” he adds. “But now we also have a brain scan study that showed that when people make a choice, that part of their brain becomes active before they knew they made a choice. What does that mean and how does that fit into the conversation about ‘Do we have free will?’ I think [neurotheology] enriches our ability to address questions about the nature of reality, about the nature of who we are as human beings.” ■

Deputy chief hails survivors’ ‘courage and resiliency’

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it will be possible for Primate Linda Nicholls to conclude her consultation with Indigenous leaders and to make an informed, engaged and too-long delayed apology on behalf of the whole Church. We are currently consulting with Indigenous leaders in order to appropriately deliver that apology. We continue to pray for the healing of those who have suffered harm.” The settlement requires the Anglican church to meet with representatives of the affected communities to craft an apology meaningful to survivors and affected communities. First Nations leaders and mental health professionals, as detailed in the documentary film *Survivors Rowe*, believe Rowe abused as many as 500 children in northern Indigenous communities. He has served less than five years in prison for his crimes—owing to a plea bargain with the Crown after a 1994 conviction for 39 sexual crimes. The plea bargain prevented Rowe from being sentenced to more prison time for similar convictions. Further convictions ensued in 2005 and 2009. Karen Webb, chancellor of the ecclesiastical province of Rupert’s Land and one of the four members of the diocese of Keewatin legal entity, said the diocese had no plans to appeal the court’s decision, which she called “a good settlement” and “a step forward.”

“I hope it achieves some of what it’s meant to achieve, which is not just the compensation, but some form of healing,” said Webb, who is also a member of the *Anglican Journal’s* editorial board. Deputy Chief Anna Betty Achneepineskum of the Nishnawbe Aski Nation, where Rowe committed his abuse, also welcomed the settlement. “Today represents a tremendous achievement for these Survivors and everyone who has worked so hard seeking validation for what they have endured,” Achneepineskum said in a statement. “We acknowledge the courage and resiliency of these brave individuals who demonstrated the strength to pursue their rightful claims through a very long and difficult legal process.” She called approval of the settlement “a plateau for this process of validation and acknowledgement of the horrific abuses that were inflicted on innocent children and carried with them into adulthood,” and added, “We stand with the Survivors in their accepting of this historic agreement.” She thanked them, their families, supporters and legal counsel. “We cannot undo the past, but we can continue to move forward in a good way to support all those who have suffered and continue to suffer,” she said. “May the Creator guide us, the Anglican Church and Boy Scouts of Canada as we move forward together.” ■

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January 2024
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DAY READING	DAY READING
<input type="checkbox"/> 1 Psalm 73:1-14	<input type="checkbox"/> 17 Jonah 3
<input type="checkbox"/> 2 Psalm 73:15-28	<input type="checkbox"/> 18 Mark 8:27-9:1
<input type="checkbox"/> 3 Psalm 74:1-11	<input type="checkbox"/> 19 Ephesians 1:15-2:10
<input type="checkbox"/> 4 Psalm 74:12-23	<input type="checkbox"/> 20 Ephesians 2:11-22
<input type="checkbox"/> 5 Ephesians 1:1-14	<input type="checkbox"/> 21 Ephesians 3
<input type="checkbox"/> 6 Matthew 2:1-12	<input type="checkbox"/> 22 Ephesians 4:1-16
<input type="checkbox"/> 7 Isaiah 60:1-12	<input type="checkbox"/> 23 Ephesians 4:17-32
<input type="checkbox"/> 8 Isaiah 60:13-22	<input type="checkbox"/> 24 Ephesians 5:1-20
<input type="checkbox"/> 9 Mark 1:1-13	<input type="checkbox"/> 25 Galatians 1:11-24
<input type="checkbox"/> 10 1 Samuel 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 26 Deuteronomy 18:9-22
<input type="checkbox"/> 11 Matthew 2:13-23	<input type="checkbox"/> 27 Psalm 111
<input type="checkbox"/> 12 Mark 1:14-20	<input type="checkbox"/> 28 Mark 1:21-28
<input type="checkbox"/> 13 John 1:19-34	<input type="checkbox"/> 29 Mark 1:29-45
<input type="checkbox"/> 14 John 1:35-51	<input type="checkbox"/> 30 Isaiah 61
<input type="checkbox"/> 15 Psalm 75	<input type="checkbox"/> 31 Isaiah 62
<input type="checkbox"/> 16 Psalm 76	

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After coming into the house they saw the Child with Mary His mother; and they fell to the ground and worshiped Him. Then, opening their treasures, they presented to Him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

—Matthew 2:11



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