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Nicholls to retire Sept. 15; Germond to step in as acting primate



PHOTOS: ANGLICAN COMMUNION OFFICE; KEVIN DOONAN

Archbishop Linda Nicholls, primate of the Anglican Church of Canada (left) and Archbishop Anne Germond, metropolitan of the ecclesiastical province of Ontario

Primate to reach mandatory retirement age in October; General Synod to elect new primate in 2025

I will enjoy walking with God's people, not as a leader, but as a friend, teacher and mentor.

—Archbishop Linda Nicholls

Sean Frankling
STAFF WRITER

Archbishop Anne Germond, bishop of the dioceses of Algoma and Moosonee and metropolitan of the ecclesiastical province of Ontario, is to become acting primate in September once Archbishop Linda Nicholls, primate of the Anglican Church of Canada, retires Sept. 15.

“In the fall of 2024 I will complete thirty-nine years of ordained ministry in the Anglican Church of Canada. Although it had been my hope to continue until General Synod 2025, I will also reach our mandatory retirement age,” wrote Nicholls in an April 9 letter to the church. “I have therefore written to the senior

If I am able to serve as acting primate I am willing to serve—God being my helper (and lots of support from the church!).

—Archbishop Anne Germond

metropolitan, Archbishop Anne Germond, to offer my resignation as of September 15, 2024.”

In a news release published the same day, the church's national office announced that until a new primate is elected at the next General Synod in the summer of 2025, Germond, “who is ... the senior provincial metropolitan by virtue of having the longest current term of office, will serve as acting primate.”

Metropolitans are senior bishops with authority over ecclesiastical provinces, of which there are four in the Anglican Church of Canada.

A resolution which would have allowed any sitting primate to finish out their term until the next General Synod meeting if

their 70th birthday—the retirement age for Anglican bishops—falls less than a year before the next election was put to General Synod in 2023. Most members of General Synod voted in favour of the resolution, which would have extended Nicholls' term to the 2025 General Synod. But the resolution needed to pass with a minimum two-thirds majority in each of the orders of clergy, laity and bishops. It failed to clear that bar in the Order of Bishops. This made it necessary for Nicholls to announce her retirement sometime before her 70th birthday in October.

Church canons call for the primate in such cases to be succeeded by an acting primate until a primatial election can be

See **METROPOLITANS**, p. 3



Beyond the pew

▲ For Richard Liu, finding a home in Christianity meant first finding somewhere he could safely question it. PHOTO: SEAN FRANKLING

Canadians' familiarity with Christianity is waning. What does this mean for a church that wants to reach them?

Sean Frankling
STAFF WRITER

Growing up in a Buddhist family in mainland China, Richard Liu didn't know much about Christianity. He had great respect for his family's beliefs, he says, as he did for all the religions of the world. But he also wasn't fully comfortable with what he

was taught at the temple they attended.

“I had desired something different, believing there must be other ways to approach life, existence and the universe,” he says.

Through a religious studies class at an international high school in Beijing, he says he picked up a few ideas about

See **SHARING**, p. 10

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Deacon arrested at climate protest



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The Chosen's writers talk creative process



RELIGION
IN MEDIA ▶

'A sense of the person': Intimacy seen as vital in fragmented landscape of online media

Matthew Puddister
STAFF WRITER

Second in a two-part series

The Rev. Daniel Brereton, incumbent at St. John's Dixie Anglican Church in Mississauga, Ont., has more than 10 times the number of followers on X (formerly known as Twitter) as the Anglican Church of Canada itself or the *Anglican Journal*.

As this article was being written, the Anglican Church of Canada's account had 10,900 followers and the *Anglican Journal's* had 9,348. By comparison, Brereton's personal account @RevDaniel had more than 114,000 followers.

The vast difference in reach between the church's official social media and that of an individual priest such as Brereton illustrates what online media practitioners and scholars say is a changing environment for religious media in the digital era—one characterized by distrust of traditional institutions, a splintered media landscape, greater focus on individual voices and a more intimate relationship with the audience.

With religious journalism in Canada's secular mass media on the wane (see "Decline of religious journalism in secular media inspires new approaches," May, p. 6), many of the country's Anglicans have embraced alternative models. Social media and podcasting are two major ways in which individual Anglicans, often without any background in traditional media or journalism, are sharing their perspectives about the church and issues of the day with a wider audience.

Brereton, who describes his previous media experience as limited to "the odd letter to the editor," tweets his personal feed on X separately from the St. John's account. Brereton describes his feed, which includes a fair amount of humour, as "everything from thoughts about this week's readings [to] stuff that I'm working on in terms of sermons or Bible studies ... I could be talking theology one minute and then I am talking politics the next. Then I'm posting pictures of my dog and then I'm complaining about my husband."

"The key for me is realizing that people want a sense of the person behind the account," he adds. "I think that's always been the struggle with churches and with institutions and organizations having social media accounts... People don't relate to organizations."

Some of his followers, Brereton says, have told him his account is the only one they follow with any connection to Christianity. Many either have no experience of church or have had very negative, even traumatic experiences with it.

Brereton believes that as both an Anglican priest and openly gay man who speaks about his marriage online,



PHOTO: CONTRIBUTED

"I could be talking theology one minute ... then I'm posting pictures of my dog," says the Rev. Daniel Brereton of his popular X account.

Associated Press boosts faith reporting with help of Lily grant

Matthew Puddister
STAFF WRITER

Part 1 of this series, with its focus on the decline of religion coverage in traditional media, had been out of the *Journal's* hands for less than a week when a new religious news offering from a long-established news agency was announced. On April 12, the Associated Press (AP) began a weekly e-newsletter, World of Faith, containing links to many of its recent articles on religion.

It seems the venerable wire service, founded in 1846, has been bucking the broader trend in secular media thanks in part to a 2019 grant from the Lily Endowment, one of the largest private philanthropic foundations in the world, that allowed it to create a new team of faith reporters.

David Crary, the AP's global

religion news director who has led the 11-person team since 2021, says before receiving this grant, AP had one full-time religion reporter based in the United States and a Rome correspondent who covered the Vatican. Although AP offered other religious coverage, journalists who also covered other beats wrote these reports. The journalists on the current team include one based in Mexico City and one in Cairo; the rest are in the United States. The grant has been renewed twice since it was first awarded.

Crary says along with writing many stories on religion each year, the team uses its financial resources to assist other AP bureaus around the world in religion coverage. The result, he says, is that "AP is producing far more quality religion stories than ever before." ■

he counters many preconceived notions of what the church and religion are like. Many connect with him because they appreciate his political thoughts or handling of online trolls, he says, but then end up hearing his thoughts on the Bible and theology. Social media, Brereton says, offer a way for people to see into the life of the church in a way that has not been possible before.

Podcasts can play a similar role, both in sharing views from within the church and looking beyond it. Two Anglican priests in London, Ont.—Canon Kevin George, dean of St. Paul's Cathedral, and the Rev. Rob Henderson, rector of the Parish of Holy Trinity-St. Stephen's Memorial—have attracted thousands of listeners with their podcast *The Vicars' Crossing*, in which they speak with guests about "where faith intersects with the public square."

The podcast began in October

2018, broadcast from the upper floor of the Crossings Pub & Eatery. Henderson is a former radio announcer, while George had no previous experience in broadcast media.

The hosts seek to incorporate diverse voices. Among the guests who have appeared on the podcast are retired Canadian general Roméo Dallaire; CNN political analyst Kirsten Powers; Episcopal priest Danielle Tumminio Hansen, whose book *Speaking of Rape* provides a theological perspective on how churches discuss sexual violence; and writer Ally Henny, vice president of The Witness: A Black Christian Collective, an organization that seeks to engage Black Christians towards liberation from racism.

George says publishers of books on religion and theology have increasingly contacted the co-hosts to arrange for authors to appear

on *The Vicars' Crossing*. "They're looking for podcasters," he says. "They're looking for, sadly, shows like *Tapestry* [CBC Radio's recently cancelled program on religion and spirituality] and others that are gone off of conventional media. But [podcasts are] where they're looking to sell their product, because that's where the listeners have gone."

Alfred Hermida, a digital media scholar at the University of British Columbia (UBC) and former BBC reporter, says particularly among Gen Z and millennials, there has been a shift away from the "bundle" model of newspapers as people instead choose to access individual news articles online, often through digital intermediaries such as their social media feeds. However, while anyone has the ability to publish and distribute content online, Hermida says, "that's not the same thing as being visible." Traditional media outlets, he notes, still often dominate digital spaces due to their established brand identity and greater resources.

"One of the differences with online media is that in some ways to build an audience," Hermida says, "you need to develop a relationship and develop the trust of that audience in terms of that what you're doing is valuable to them."

"There's a bit more of maybe a healthy distrust of automatically assigning trust to people because they belong to an institution," he adds. "I think the difference with digital and online is that you have to earn that trust."

Another trend Hermida describes is a shift away from the "abstract voice of authority" in journalism towards greater emphasis on the individual voice. Researching X, Hermida has found that individual accounts by journalists have far more followers than institutional accounts because people want a sense of personal connection.

"That's one of the things that social media, and podcasting particularly, is very good at," Hermida says. Podcasting often feels more intimate than radio, he says, since it's more likely to involve the deliberate choice to listen rather than passively hearing radio in the background. "Usually it's through headphones, so this person is in your head talking to you individually. It's different from a radio experience that's playing on in the background."

"It's certainly understandable why some priests might have podcasts that reach way more people than the institutional voice of the church or ... journalism publications, because it feels that that person is talking to you," Hermida says. "I think that's one of the shifts we've seen, especially with Gen Z. They want a relationship; they want a connection ... They want something where identity, who you are, where you come from—that all matters." ■

Correction

The name of the body that nominates candidates for Archbishop of Canterbury is the Crown Nominations Commission. Incorrect information appeared in the April *Anglican Journal*.

PRIMACY ▶

Metropolitans all agree on Germond as acting primate, though seniority questions linger

Greg does think he's senior, but he said, 'I don't want to do the job.'

—Karen Webb, spokesperson for Archbishop Greg Kerr-Wilson

Continued from p. 1

held, and stipulate that the acting primate be the church's senior metropolitan by election, as long as that person is able and willing.

Germond confirmed by text message to the *Journal* that she would accept the position if it came to her. "If I am able to serve as acting primate I am willing to serve—God being my helper (and lots of support from the church!)"

Born in South Africa and raised a Roman Catholic, Germond described, in a 2016 *Anglican Journal* article, the nuns at her Johannesburg high school as role models for her when they took a stand against apartheid and opened the school to Black students in 1976. She joined the Anglican church while still in high school, she said, after having fallen in love with Evensong and other elements of the Anglican liturgical tradition. Since then she has had a career as an educator, first at South African primary schools and then at the Johannesburg College of Education, where she taught religious studies and English teaching methods. In 1986, she and her husband moved to Canada, where she taught ESL as a volunteer until she had completed her honours degree in religious studies through the University of South Africa and a bachelor's degree in theology from Sudbury's Thorneloe University.

Germond's career in the church has been marked by rapid and sometimes unexpected advancement. In 2000, then-Bishop of Algoma Ron Ferris invited her to serve as short-term lay incumbent at the Anglican Church of the Ascension in New Sudbury, Ont., where she became a deacon in 2001 and a priest in 2002. The congregation asked her to stay on as rector, which she did for the next decade and a half, also serving as territorial archdeacon for Sudbury/Manitoulin beginning in 2010. She was nominated from the floor on the sixth ballot of the 2016 Algoma synod and elected bishop. She was elected to become metropolitan of Ontario just two years later.

Nicholls' announcement that Germond was her temporary successor followed a March 22 letter to Germond by the chancellor of General Synod, the officer tasked with advising the primate on legal matters. In her letter, Chancellor Clare Burns explained why, in her opinion, Germond was "senior by election" to the other three metropolitans. In the same letter, Burns also said she understood the primate and metropolitans had agreed Germond should serve as acting primate whether they agreed with her interpretation of the canon or not.

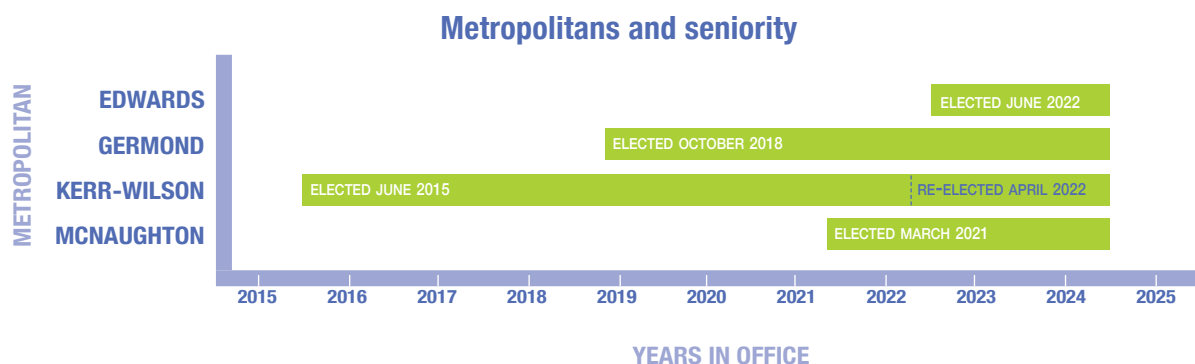
Of the Anglican Church of Canada's current metropolitans, the longest-serving is Archbishop Greg Kerr-Wilson, voted in as metropolitan of the ecclesiastical province of Rupert's Land in 2015. Germond was elected to a six-year term as metropolitan of Ontario in 2018. However, Kerr-Wilson was re-elected in 2022, setting him back in seniority, according to the opinion given by Burns.

"In my opinion, a bishop is only a provincial metropolitan by virtue of the most recent election which has resulted in them taking office," Burns wrote. "This must be the case as it is, for example, possible for a bishop to be elected at a provincial synod in year one thus becoming provincial metropolitan, not be elected at the next



PHOTOS: GISELE MCKNIGHT, GEORGE CRIBBS, ARIANNE TUBMAN, HILITE STUDIOS

The Anglican Church of Canada's four provincial metropolitans (L-R): Archbishop David Edwards, Archbishop Anne Germond, Archbishop Greg Kerr-Wilson and Archbishop Lynne McNaughton



▲ In the view of General Synod Chancellor Clare Burns, metropolitans owe their titles to the most recent election to put them in office, meaning Archbishop Greg Kerr-Wilson's seniority reset when he was re-elected in 2022.

GRAPHIC: SASKIA ROWLEY

provincial election thus ceasing to be a provincial metropolitan, and thereafter be elected again to take office a second time."

Germond is up for re-election at Ontario's provincial synod Sept. 24, but she will be senior by election, according to Burns' interpretation of the canon, as of the date of Nicholls' retirement, Sept 15.

The *Journal* requested an interview with Kerr-Wilson, but as he was on vacation at the time, Karen Webb, chancellor of the ecclesiastical province of Rupert's Land, spoke on his behalf. She said Kerr-Wilson believed himself to be senior by election, but confirmed he had no interest in the position of acting primate.

"Greg does think he's senior, but he said, 'I don't want to do the job,'" which would mean an additional substantial role on top of his current ones as bishop of the diocese of Calgary and metropolitan of Rupert's Land, she said.

Webb is a member of the *Anglican Journal's* editorial board, but she recused herself from a discussion the board held on how to handle this story.

Burns declined a request for an interview on how "senior by election" had been interpreted in prior cases or whether the canon's original intent was to select the metropolitan with the most total experience in office. Burns' predecessor as chancellor, Canon (lay) David Jones, also believed re-elections would reset metropolitans' seniority.

Archbishop Lynne McNaughton, metropolitan of the ecclesiastical province of British Columbia and Yukon, said the metropolitans had asked Burns to give an opinion on the interpretation of "senior by election" at a meeting this spring. Since Kerr-Wilson had already said he was not interested in filling the acting primate role, McNaughton said she thought the opinion would be useful to have on the books to help resolve any questions that arise when future acting primates are selected.

Canon Iain Luke, prolocutor of the ecclesiastical province of Rupert's Land, said he had no concerns about the selection of Germond as acting primate, but was concerned about Burns' interpretation of "senior by election" as a new standard for future cases. He said the practice of re-electing metropolitans is comparatively new, and each province has its own rules about how long a metropolitan is in office

and whether they need to be re-elected. This makes it awkward and complicated to base the national system on the last time they were elected, as opposed to simply the number of years they have held the office, he said.

In the April 9 news release, Archdeacon Alan Perry, general secretary of General Synod, said it had been a privilege for him to work with Nicholls. "In addition to her keen insight and her love for and breadth of knowledge of the church, she has brought care, compassion and joy in the Gospel to her various roles. Staff will miss her singing voice as much as her preaching voice in our regular chapel gatherings. I will miss a friend and mentor who has constantly supported me and encouraged me to grow."

In her announcement, Nicholls said she would welcome the time of rest without the responsibilities of leadership that would follow her retirement.

"The greatest joy has been to share in the relationship between God and God's people through pastoral care, preaching, teaching and sacramental ministries and advocate for justice and compassion for all," Nicholls wrote. "To see God at work bringing healing and hope in the midst of the sorrows, pain and joy of daily life for individuals, families, communities and our wider world is a privilege that cannot be measured.

"I will enjoy walking with God's people, not as a leader, but as a friend, teacher and mentor alongside opportunities that allow my soul to sing—literally and figuratively. Thank you for the privilege of serving our beloved church. Thank you for your prayers, care and support through the good times and the difficult ones."

At an April 10 dinner held by the national House of Bishops, Germond announced that the house would create a fund to provide educational funding in Nicholls' name. The Archbishop Linda Nicholls Theological Education Fund will provide bursaries to fund theological education for women across Canada, Germond told the assembled bishops, according to a news release from the Anglican Foundation of Canada (AFC).

The House of Bishops will provide the initial funding of \$20,000, and the fund will be managed and disbursed by the AFC. ■

ANGLICAN VOICES ▶


“Where the Church had seen self-interest as aberrant behaviour demanding repentance, the modern social thinkers and proto-economists saw it as both an unavoidable reality and an opportunity.”

We're good, right?

Re-thinking a foundational era—and idea

By Wade Rowland

TWO CHEERS

For the Enlightenment, the great European intellectual movement of the 17th and 18th centuries. It bequeathed very real and substantial improvements in the human condition. But it also paved the way to the existential threats darkening our current horizons.

It was a time when Roman Catholicism was being shouldered aside as the dominant moral and intellectual influence in Europe, and when Protestantism blossomed along with political ideals of individualism and democracy.

Enlightenment-era reformers were inspired by the discoveries of scientists like Galileo and Bacon and Newton, and in the thrall of social and political thinkers like René Descartes, Thomas Hobbes, Baruch Spinoza and the early economists, including the putative founder of the “dismal science,” Adam Smith. It would not be long before Charles Darwin and his shocking theory of evolution would make it possible to imagine a world without a Creator, and to describe it scientifically.

It was in this time of scientific discovery, technical change and intellectual ferment that modern capitalism emerged, with its emphasis on growth, efficiency, markets and their dynamics, disciplined labour and the accumulation of capital.

The ancient Christian idea of redemption, of a return to Eden, was transformed by more modern, forward-looking notions of endless exploration and discovery in science, of limitless progress through technology.

Moral concerns were not ignored by materialist, rationalist Enlightenment thinkers—quite the opposite. For many of them, the emergence and maintenance of the good was guaranteed by the self-balancing dynamics of novel societal institutions modelled on divinely ordained natural law. Foremost among these institutions was the liberal capitalist market economy within which, as Adam Smith claimed, issues of

▲ **Some of the biggest problems facing the world today are rooted in the false idea that humans are egoists by nature, writes the author.**

PHOTO: PRAZIS IMAGES

justice and equity were always already taken care of by an “invisible hand.” Dextrous and supple, it generated moral outcomes *in spite of* humanity’s native wickedness. Workers, compelled by the system to overcome their otherwise incorrigible idleness, could be guaranteed income sufficient to ensure the continuing procreation of an adequate labour pool; greedy entrepreneurs could ensure wealth and success by producing high-quality goods that were in demand. Industrial civilization operated as a self-disciplining virtuous circle without the need for extra-rational, spiritual guidance of the kind that had for so long been provided by religion. The system would transform individual venality into collective welfare.

At least that was the idea.

Here we must pause to reflect on that phrase “humanity’s native wickedness.” A prominent Enlightenment perspective on humans was that we are innately and incorrigibly self-obsessed, that we are born egoists. Both Hobbes’ famous vision of primitive humans as constantly at war with one another, and Darwin’s evolutionary parable of vicious intra- and inter-species competition for scarce resources had seemed to confirm this.

But where the Church had seen such self-interest as aberrant behaviour demanding repentance, the modern social thinkers and proto-economists saw it as both an unavoidable reality and an opportunity. In their moral philosophy “good” was defined pragmatically, in terms of the satisfaction of human desires. Given that capitalist markets and the social and industrial practices that supported them addressed those desires, they were manufacturers of good.

And by extension, continuous evolution

of technology, an important driver of economic prosperity, was also classified as morally good: a product of science and industry, it helped to satisfy human desires. As such, it provided a visible and tangible pathway to a certain kind of redemption—a transcending of the bonds of nature.

All of which brings us to our present predicament, on the doorstep of a future that seems likely only to accelerate an already pathological growth ethic, with an overheated planet and ongoing ecological disaster plus the prospect of apocalyptic nuclear warfare, all accelerated by inscrutable, all-powerful artificial intelligence.

What to do? How do we change paths?

It’s a tall order, but not an impossibility if we can finally dispense with that perversely erroneous, discredited tenet of Enlightenment philosophy that defines humanity as irredeemably wicked, and instead remember that *we are innately good*. Born that way. It’s a truth that’s available to each of us through common sense and reflection. It is acknowledged and celebrated in classical Greek philosophy and all the great monotheistic religions. In my careers as a journalist and academic I’ve watched for decades as that ancient moral insight has gained the reinforcement of social-scientific researchers, reluctant though they may be to involve themselves with metaphysics.

With that truth firmly in mind we might see that nothing less than a new social contract is what’s necessary and appropriate to our post-modern condition: stronger market regulation to reduce the economic and political influence of industrial and commercial monopolies and oligopolies; a new ethic of corporate social responsibility that replaces hypocrisy with genuine commitment; more equitable distribution of wealth to replace the current winner-take-all ethic; and an improved and expanded social safety net perhaps founded on a guaranteed annual income, for starters.

We need to explicitly re-incorporate moral values into political and economic decision making. When we do, we’ll be capable of *real* progress, going with the flow instead of against the grain. ■

Wade Rowland is emeritus professor in media and communication at York University, Toronto. He is author of more than a dozen books, most recently *The Storm of Progress: Climate Change, AI, and the Roots of Our Dangerous Ethical Myopia*, and is a member of St. Mark’s Anglican Church, Port Hope, Ont.


LETTERS ▶

Neuhaus interview put Israel-Palestine conflict in historical context

I have followed the Israeli-Palestine situation for the past number of years and the article, ‘This is one of the most emotionally charged times I have known,’ (April, p. 6) is the most honest, insightful, and balanced reporting that I have ever come across.

It puts the present conflict in its historical context which all other media tend to ignore, which focus instead on the Oct. 7 attack and what has happened since.

Phillip Carter
Halifax, N.S.

Balanced tone appreciated

The interview with Fr. David Neuhaus about the Israeli/Palestinian conflict is one of the best articles I’ve ever read on it. The information he conveyed about the background of the current conflict was extremely helpful. I also appreciated the balanced tone of Neuhaus’ comments. The questions were well-chosen, and wrapping up the interview with the question about the role of Christians was a fitting way to end.

Murray MacAdam
Peterborough, Ont.

Interview ‘disturbing and one-sided’

I found Fr. David Neuhaus’ views on the situation in Israel and Palestine disturbing and one-sided.

I agree wholeheartedly with him that Netanyahu’s government will always be an obstacle to any lasting peace in the region; I also think that the Israeli people are realizing this and are asking for an early election, which would probably result in his removal from power.

On the other hand, Neuhaus’ description of the Palestinians as pure victims does not hold water. The description of the Hamas

attack on Oct. 7 as being by a group of militants conveniently overlooks the fact that many of the attacks were conducted by the governing authority of Gaza.

I do not see any easy solution. The idea of both peoples living in harmony in a single state is a total non-starter. The killing has to stop and Netanyahu has to be replaced, but there is also desperate need for some real Palestinian leadership, which has never been in evidence since 1948.

John Sutherland
Calgary, Alta.

The Anglican Journal welcomes letters to the editor.

Since not all letters can be published, preference is given to short correspondence (300 words or less). All letters are subject to editing.

SINGING WITH JOY ▶



Thoughts on a change of season

By Linda Nicholls

WHEN MY FAMILY moved to Ontario from the West Coast, the first difference we noticed was the distinctiveness of the seasons, especially the fall. Each season has its own unique gifts in Ontario, and we enjoyed the transitions from one to another.

Our lives have a similar pattern of distinctive seasons shaped by our age, work, family and location. From youth to adulthood; from single to partnered and then to family life; from one vocation to another our lives shift and change. Some of these changes are the result of a decades-long process; others are prompted by a sudden event, as when a death happens unexpectedly. In each transition there is a time of grieving what has been lost and growing into a new way of living that brings new joys and opportunities. A plaque in my hallway reminds me, “Bidden or not—God is present.”

On Sept. 15 I am beginning a transition of vocation after almost 39 years of ordained ministry. I will still be an ordained bishop but without a particular role in a parish or diocese or national office. I will be “retired.” In the past months of reflection on this transition I’ve begun wondering, first, what it will be like to not have the responsibilities of the primacy or a diocese to occupy my heart and mind. I’ve begun to acknowledge the losses of role and identity I’ll experience—



PHOTO: ROWLEY/SHUTTERSTOCK COMPOSITE

losses I both long for and anticipate with sadness.

More recently I’ve begun to reflect on what I might gain—the new opportunities that lie before me to engage my vocation differently and to renew other vocations left behind in the dust of time pressures and travel. Now there is excitement at the possibilities: to be fully present to music, by singing or playing piano and flute; to explore teaching opportunities with a variety of people, thereby exploring our faith together. I look forward to having a schedule that allows for spontaneity, and time—time to accompany others on the journey of faith as a mentor or spiritual companion, and time just to be present to

God, as God exists in our midst: in beauty, in creation, in song and in people.

Just as every year of my life I’ve longed for the next season in creation and its gifts, I am longing for the gifts of the season of retirement. There are many aspects of this ministry that I will miss. However, I know, as the 1970s-era bumper sticker puts it, “God isn’t finished with me yet.” And so I will gently grieve what I’m leaving behind—and joyfully enter into the possibilities of the future, trusting God will be present to open doors in ways I have not yet imagined.

Thanks be to God. ■

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

FEATHER AND SAGE



A call to ‘lift up the feather of prayer and love’

By Chris Harper

FEATHER (Prayer): Creator God, we the children of your creation lift our prayer for those whose voices have been silenced, for those lost to the struggles of change and control, for the peoples suppressed for just existing. We pray to you and lift up to you our relatives in the Indigenous circles across the land: the many caught up in the Sixties Scoop; the survivors—or conquerors, you could also call them, because they were undefeated—of the Indian residential schools, industrial schools and day schools. We pray for those who keep going, despite the legacy of the processes of assimilation and the resultant effects. We pray for those searching for lost family and identity, the wounded, rejected and broken. We pray and remember the missing and murdered Indigenous women and men, the families seeking justice and closure. We pray for all our relatives across the face of creation affected by war and inequality. Help us human beings to lay to rest the weapons of word and hand, and instead lift up the feather of prayer and love. Help us your children of this world to see you, in the eyes of the other, and treat the other before us as our family in you. Forgive our failures to listen and understand, our failures to accept truths other than our own. Guide us and help us this day to



walk with you, guided by your Spirit, and to be renewed. Guide us to be better today than we were yesterday and the day before. Bless us now to be a blessing to others. This we pray in Jesus, the peacemaker. Amen.



SAGE (Offering): As the print edition of the *Anglican Journal* takes its usual pause for the summer months, and with June 21 being the National Indigenous Day of Prayer, I wanted to leave everyone knowing that the church and its ministry do not stop. More importantly, prayer does not stop. As we step into the summer months, I ask that you continue being the prayer warriors that we are all called to be. Pray for your community and church leaders, councils and committees, elders, children and youth, parents, extended families and church families. Pray always and be wrapped in prayer, knowing that someone is praying for you always. Pray for wisdom and peace, that love and truth can abound. Please, all of you, go into the summer knowing that you are loved and blessed, because God is with you ... and because we together walk in prayer. Peace and safe summer. ■

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

ANGLICAN JOURNAL

First published as the *Dominion Churchman* in 1875, *The Anglican Journal* is the national newspaper of the Anglican Church of Canada.

EDITOR: Tali Folkins
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EDITORIAL POLICY: Since 2019, the *Anglican Journal* has been tasked by General Synod with producing content of “the highest standards of journalistic responsibility, accuracy, fairness, accountability and transparency” that is “fact-based, fact-checked and in-depth, tackling important issues, asking and answering difficult questions.” General Synod, as publisher, respects and defends its journalistic integrity. While General Synod retains the right to intervene in stories which have the potential to bring the church into disrepute, it expects to exercise that right rarely, if ever; in cases of unresolvable conflict or disagreement, General Synod has the right to order changes, but the changes so ordered must be publicly noted in the *Journal*. The policies and practices that govern the *Journal* can be found in full online, at bit.ly/41f65Q.

EDITORIAL BOARD: The editorial board exists to advise the editor on journalistic matters; it does not exercise direct authority over the operations of the *Anglican Journal*. It can be reached at ajedboard@googlegroups.com.

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ENVIRONMENT ▶



PHOTO: MARTIN REIS

Police arrest the Rev. Michael Van Dusen during a protest at a Toronto RBC branch against the bank's investments in fossil fuels.

Interfaith climate activists arrested at RBC sit-in protest

Matthew Puddister
STAFF WRITER

Toronto police arrested nine interfaith climate activists, including an Anglican deacon, at a downtown Royal Bank of Canada (RBC) branch April 9 during a sit-in protest against the bank's investment in fossil fuel projects.

Members of the Faith and Climate Action Network (FCAN)—which includes various Christian denominations as well as Muslims—read a statement at the “pray-in” saying they were engaged in non-violent protest to oppose RBC’s “leading role in the destruction of our planet.” A report from Banking on Climate Chaos, a coalition of environmental groups, found that RBC was the world’s largest financier of fossil fuel development in 2022 with more than \$42 billion (U.S.) in funding.

“Protecting the planet that has been given us by our Creator is not just a matter of economics or the environment but is a matter of our faiths,” the FCAN statement said, adding, “We are here to disrupt Royal Bank’s business as usual. We will not stop until Royal Bank ceases its investments in fossil fuel extraction.”

The Rev. Michael Van Dusen, vocational deacon at the Church of St. Aidan in the Beach, said a bank manager immediately approached the protesters and threatened to call the police. The protesters sat in a circle, prayed and sang songs until police arrived 20 minutes later.

Van Dusen was among the nine charged and ticketed for trespassing and received a \$65 fine. As of April 18, some had paid the fine with donations from supporters. Others, including Van Dusen, were waiting to learn more about the court process and whether there was any chance to make a statement.

“This is a campaign. This is not an event,” Van Dusen told the *Anglican Journal*.

“This won’t be the last time we target RBC,” he added, and suggested the group has its eye on other financial industry players also.

“There are still significant investments

▶ Faith and Climate Action Network members engage in their sit-in protest at the RBC branch.

PHOTO: MARTIN REIS



PHOTO: MARTIN REIS

Police arrest a protester from the Faith and Climate Action Network.

by virtually all the other major banks. There’s a lot to be done.”

FCAN members previously had written a letter to RBC senior vice president John Stackhouse Oct. 24, urging RBC to publicly commit to an immediate end to investment in new fossil fuel projects; to publish a plan for phasing out support for all existing fossil fuel projects, and to not lend to companies that operate in Indigenous territories without free, prior and informed consent.

When RBC did not respond, FCAN protested in front of its corporate headquarters in January. Continued lack of response led to the pray-in, part of a series of protests by First Nations and

environmental groups leading up to RBC’s annual general meeting April 11.

Canon Andrea Budgey, priest-in-charge at St. Theodore of Canterbury Anglican Church, also in Toronto, attended April 9 as part of the support team outside, handing out leaflets and explaining their protest to passers-by.

“I’ve always seen protesting investment in fossil fuels as part of our baptismal promises that we have, along with people of many other faith groups—a spiritual and an ethical responsibility to safeguard the creation we’ve been given,” Budgey said. “For people who are not in positions of power, civil disobedience is one of the tools we can use.”

RBC did not respond to requests by the *Journal* for comment.

In an Earth Day 2024 statement published April 16, Anglican and Lutheran leaders—Archbishop Linda Nicholls, primate of the Anglican Church of Canada; National Bishop Susan Johnson of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada and National Indigenous Anglican Archbishop Chris Harper—called on church members to take concrete steps to address the climate crisis.

Suggested action included planning or joining community events for Earth Week; advocating for effective government climate policy; discerning how congregations could respond by drawing upon the Parish Engagement Resource for Social and Ecological Justice; learning about the carbon impacts of church buildings and how to reduce emissions; and praying for healing, solidarity and action for the earth and its inhabitants. ■

INDIGENOUS CHURCH ▶

Two vacant positions filled in Indigenous Ministries

“This idea of working together and finding our way together, I think it’s important for our future as a church and it’s important for our future as an Indigenous church.”

—The Rev. Rosalyn Elm

Matthew Puddister
STAFF WRITER

Two key Indigenous Ministries staff positions have been filled with the hiring of the Rev. Rosalyn Elm as coordinator and Krista Pura as program associate.

Elm, who is Oneida and the first Indigenous woman ordained in the diocese of Huron, was Huron’s animator of reconciliation and Indigenous ministry and priest-in-charge of the Parish of the Six Nations when she was named General Synod’s new Indigenous Ministries coordinator. The announcement came April 25 during a meeting of the Anglican Council of Indigenous Peoples (ACIP) in Leduc, Alta.

Formerly Her Majesty’s Royal Chaplain at Mohawk Chapel in Brantford, Ont., Elm was also a candidate for national Indigenous Anglican archbishop in 2022, alongside current National Indigenous Anglican Archbishop Chris Harper. She says she was “completely blown away” by the offer to become Indigenous Ministries coordinator and that it was an honour and privilege to be considered for both positions.

In conversations with Harper, ACIP members and Bishop of Huron Todd Townshend, Elm said, “We have this hope and this vision of working together and this idea of mutual interdependence and relationship and responsibility. How can we model that for both the Indigenous



PHOTO: CONTRIBUTED

The Rev. Rosalyn Elm is the new Indigenous Ministries coordinator.



▲ Krista Pura started as program associate April 15.

PHOTO: CONTRIBUTED

church and the non-Indigenous church? This idea of working together and finding our way together, I think it’s important for our future as a church and it’s important for our future as an Indigenous church.”

As Indigenous Ministries coordinator, Elm takes over the role that had been filled on an interim basis by Donna Bomberry

following the death of former coordinator Ginny Doctor.

Harper described Elm as “a great educator and speaker”, a hard worker who would make “a wonderful addition to the Indigenous Ministries family, as well as for the Anglican Church to represent the church and the Indigenous community.” He praised Elm’s “experience of Indigenous ministries on reserve and off reserve, as well as her ability to think outside the box.”

“That’s what we need, especially going forward in Indigenous Ministries—to be able to take a look at the historic setting

and landscape of the Anglican Church and adapt the Indigenous concepts, ideals and hopes and dreams of the people to bring better relationships and build on the bridges between the Anglican Church and the Indigenous communities,” Harper said.

While the coordinator oversees the general work of Indigenous Ministries, the program associate provides administrative and program support to the national Indigenous archbishop. In the latter position, Pura takes over from Teresa Mandricks, who served as program associate prior to her retirement in 2023.

Originally from north of Edmonton, Pura has worked in administrative positions for chemical and real estate companies as well as in content marketing. Harper said Pura has “been doing a phenomenal job in getting everything organized” since she started as program associate April 15, describing her as “an incredibly adept, intuitive ‘people person’ ... We’re incredibly blessed to have her.”

Pura told the *Anglican Journal*, “My family is Indigenous and I’ve done a number of jobs in my life, but I was looking to do something a little bit more where I’m giving back.” She applied to work for the church in Indigenous Ministries because “I want to do something where I’m helping other people.” ■

WORSHIP ▶

Conference to examine inclusivity in liturgy

Sean Frankling
STAFF WRITER

Meeting in Regina this summer for the first time since before the pandemic, the National Worship Conference will examine how church liturgy and worship practices can better reflect the diversity of modern congregations, says the co-chair of the event’s planning committee, Kate Berringer.

The conference, held jointly by the Anglican Church of Canada and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC), normally happens every three years. An online gathering was held in 2021, but the conference has not met in person since 2018. Because of this interruption, Berringer told the *Journal* in late April, it was unclear how many guests would be making their way to Regina July 18-21 to participate. Still, she confirmed as this article was being written that registration was open and guests had begun to trickle in.

This year’s conference, titled “The Stones Cry Out,” will feature guest speakers Michelle Nieviadomy, a Cree woman and assistant director of the Edmonton Healing Centre, a nonprofit which provides counseling and outreach services; Becca Whitla, a professor of



▲ Dancers perform at a Black Heritage Celebration Service February 2020 in Toronto. One of the conference’s goals is to examine how worship can represent more of the diverse backgrounds of Anglicans, including styles that involve more expression through movement, says Berringer.

PHOTO: MICHAEL HUDSON

practical ministry and pastoral theology at Saskatoon’s St. Andrew’s College who studies ways to decolonize liturgical practice; and the Rev. Chung Yan Lam, a Lutheran pastor at All Saints’ Anglican Church Westboro in the diocese of Ottawa with expertise in expressions of worship across cultures.

Berringer said she expected the subject matter of this year’s conference to be sensitive and controversial. The event’s website describes its purpose as exploring what it means to decolonize expressions of worship in the Anglican and Lutheran churches.

Berringer says it’s about identifying the ways in which Anglicans and Lutherans from outside European-derived culture don’t see themselves reflected in the churches’ worship, and about finding ways to make it their own.

The word “decolonize” has so many disparate meanings to people according to their backgrounds and preconceived ideas, she says, that the conference may not get beyond negotiating a shared understanding

of what the churches need to do to make themselves more inclusive. But even if that means having some difficult and uncomfortable conversations, she says it’s worth doing.

“I fully expect people to attend this conference and have pushback on everything from the title, to the description, to who we’ve included as far as workshop leaders,” she says. “We do expect people to be uncomfortable, probably. We’re providing prayer support, we’ve got chaplains ready ... It’s human nature to feel defensive when the perception is ‘what you’re doing isn’t working, we’ve got to change it and make it better.’”

Berringer adds that acknowledging the limitations of worship practices and liturgy that were formed by and reflect a mostly European worldview doesn’t necessarily mean scrapping them all and starting over. Rather, she sees the conference as an opportunity to talk about how Anglicans and Lutherans can add to their traditional repertoires and create new opportunities to reflect a wider variety of cultures.

“From an African perspective, the thing I’ve heard is that inclusive worship would allow for more movement and expression of emotion,” she says. But attempts to integrate these elements into worship here have sometimes met with resistance. “Typically what some people have experienced is, ‘We don’t do that in North America,’” she says.

“What does it look like to build upon [existing liturgy] and also include people from other perspectives?”

Registration for the National Worship Conference is currently open through the event’s website, nationalworshipconference.org. ■

“I fully expect people to attend this conference and have pushback on everything from the title, to the description, to who we’ve included as far as workshop leaders.”

—Kate Berringer



Together we share in God's trust

Give thanks to the God of heaven. His love endures forever. Psalm 136:26



PHOTOS: BRIAN BUKOWSKI AND ANGLICAN VIDEO

National Indigenous Anglican Archbishop Chris Harper presents a gift of an eagle feather from the Anglican Council of Indigenous Peoples. Inset: Archbishop Chris Harper (left) and Canon Murray Still, co-chair of the Anglican Council of Indigenous Peoples, embrace after signing the Covenant and Our Way of Life.

Growing Indigenous Ministries

Indigenous Ministries for the original peoples of this land has been growing and building. We offer and give thanksgiving for those who so faithfully walked, supported, prayed and blessed the ministry in the past and going forward.

Presently, we are rebuilding the office with new administrative staff and program coordinators, while striving for equal representation for the east, west and north of this glorious land base. We are working to staff two offices—Edmonton and Toronto—to respond to the needs and ministry west and east of Winnipeg, respectively. Northern communities will be served by the office that is closest to them.

The Anglican Council of Indigenous Peoples and Sacred Circle are preparing to build on 2023 and live into the Covenant presented to General

Synod, as well as taking the next steps necessitated by the document *Our Way of Life*.

Indigenous Ministries seeks to remain a conduit of reconciliation and healing through dialogue and teachings. We seek to walk with all our relatives in Christ and move forward at the pace of the slowest and most resistant among us. We are a patient peoples who understand community and the need to share the gifts and blessings of all peoples in the Almighty's created circle. In this, I close with a blessing to all. Stay in prayer and bless each other, as you have been so richly blessed.

In peace,

—The Most Rev. Christopher Harper, National Indigenous Anglican Archbishop

A message from the Primate



PHOTO: COURTESY OF LINDA NICHOLLS

The Primate celebrates Palm Sunday with the parishioners of St. Christopher's Anglican Church in Haines Junction, Yukon.

IN A FEW months, I will be retiring after serving five years as Primate of the Anglican Church of Canada.

One of the gifts of these years for me has been the privilege of visiting parishes and dioceses across Canada. I saw the marvelous resilience of Anglicans who faithfully continued worship online or in person; reached out to care for parishioners, neighbours and strangers; and supported the ministries of our church locally and nationally.

Many challenges remain but I am always hopeful that wherever people of faith are being fed by God's word and table, there will be a church community that wants to share the love of Jesus Christ and to love their neighbour as themselves. I see dioceses committed to deepening our life in Christ. I am encouraged by our key areas of

commitment to human dignity; to justice and peace; to nurturing and sustaining creation; to right relationships locally and globally; and to mutual interdependence with the Sacred Circle and Indigenous reconciliation.

We have a vision for the future rooted in the gospel, and we have clergy and lay people committed to engaging together in what that means in the 21st century in every part of Canada. Wherever two or three are gathered to light the candle of the love of Christ, there the church thrives.

Thank you for the privilege of sharing with you in being the light of Christ through our Anglican Church of Canada.

—The Most Rev. Linda Nicholls, Archbishop and Primate, Anglican Church of Canada

Working toward a more just world

The Public Witness for Social and Ecological Justice (PWSEJ) ministry of the General Synod continues to be a national expression of the efforts toward a more just and equitable world taking place across all levels of the church. Working with ecumenical and civil society partners, PWSEJ advocates for policy change with the federal government, mobilizes grassroots action and education, and brings together networks of concerned

Anglicans working on key justice issues.

In 2024, we will focus on mobilizing Canadians to take action for the climate through the "For the Love of Creation" network; establishing the next stage of national work on dismantling racism and disseminating a parish engagement tool in collaboration with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada. We will also be working with Black Anglicans of Canada to offer a series of gatherings for Black Anglican leaders across the country.



For the **Love** of **Creation**

Renewing liturgical expression

The Faith, Worship, and Ministry committee has been engaged in renewing the liturgical expression of local worshipping communities by producing new and revised liturgical texts and other resources. By the end of 2024, we expect to have revised rites for the ordination of bishops, priests and deacons circulating for critical feedback.



This work takes as its beginning the texts of the Book of Alternative Services and incorporates a deeper and clearer sense of the ministry of all the baptised in relation to ordained ministries. It roots the liturgies in a more expansive sense of our participation in God's mission of healing and reconciliation in the life of the world.

Thank you!

If you feel called to make a donation, please use the enclosed reply envelope. Your generosity inspires and motivates us.



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A supplement to the Anglican Journal provided by Resources for Mission, June 2024

Flourishing in the Spirit

The theme for the Council of General Synod these two years—*Rooted in the Word; Flourishing in the Spirit*—builds on last year's General Synod theme of *Let there be Greening*. It takes its inspiration from the vision in Revelation 22 of a tree bearing twelve kinds of fruit—one for each month—and bringing healing. In a world crying out for healing, we seek to bear fruit year-round in areas such as working for justice, building stronger relations with our Anglican Communion and full communion partners, ongoing ecumenical and interfaith engagement, and growing support for the emerging self-determining Indigenous Church. These signs of flourishing are nurtured by our encounters with the Word made flesh in worship, fellowship and the scriptures.

The work of the General Synod flourishes as we seek to reflect our transformational commitments in all that we do. It flourishes because of the faithful and generous commitment of time, talent and treasure of so many volunteers and donors who support our work.

Thank you for your generosity in enabling the General Synod to be rooted in the Word and to flourish in the Spirit.

—The Venerable Alan T. Perry, General Secretary



I love using Giving with Grace as it allows me to give all in one place to many causes that are important to me and have been a part of my life as a lay person and then a priest. I have done ecumenical ministry, worked with Indigenous people, seen young people attend CLAY and been involved in environmental work. Through Giving with Grace, I feel I am able to support and love my neighbour.

Elizabeth (Betty) Piworar
DIOCESE OF CALGARY



IMAGE: CONTRIBUTED

The logo of the current biennium of the Council of General Synod.

A global partner for God's mission

Global Relations strives to nurture right relationships with people of faith in local, national and global communities and networks, working in partnership with provinces of the Anglican Communion and international ecumenical movements. We accompany partners in the building up of national church infrastructure and ministry, enable local-global Anglican companionship in mission and demonstrate solidarity for justice and dignity for all.

In 2024, we are renewing our partnership with the Anglican Communion in the South Pacific and participating in the Asia Pacific Interfaith Conference on Service and Advocacy with Migrant Peoples to help strengthen regional efforts in eradicating human trafficking and modern slavery. We are continuing full communion and ecumenical solidarity and advocacy toward peace with justice in Palestine, Israel and the Philippines. And we are excited to be in renewed covenant companionship with the Igreja Episcopal Anglicana do Brasil, in support of the primate ministry of Archbishop Marinez Bassotto and our shared commitments to gender justice.



Through all the seasons of our lives, from infants at the font to the seniors we somehow (!) now find ourselves, the Church has kept faith with us, even through times when we were too preoccupied to be as faithful in return. We love the many good and faithful people that we've met, we're nourished by our Anglican liturgy and sacramentality, and we embrace our Church's commitment to going forward where Christ and the Spirit lead us. We're thankful that we're in a financial position to support our beloved Church, locally and nationally, so that it can continue its ministry for future generations.

Joy Packham and the
Rev. Dr. Michael Peterson
DIOCESE OF TORONTO

Supporting Youth Ministry



PHOTO: SU MCLEOD

Youth leaders from across the country gather to reflect on how best to support young people.

Our young people are struggling. Youth leaders are burnt out from their efforts to provide support.

Youth Ministries has been focusing on addressing these issues for the past couple of years. We have held two retreats called Rhythms of Renewal to gather youth leaders and give them time to connect, strategize, reflect and renew. This fall, we will offer dioceses and youth leaders resources and leadership opportunities in a program on mindfulness-based stress reduction for teens.

The current National Youth Project, More Precious, focuses on human trafficking. Many people don't realize that human trafficking happens in Canada, but in fact young people are



being trafficked every day. The More Precious project offers resources that youth leaders can use with their

youth groups to look at the topics of identity, self-worth, internet safety and consent and healthy relationships. One of the goals of the project is to boost the self-esteem of young people so they will be less at risk of being trafficked.

▶ MISSION

Sharing the good news by overcoming the 'tyranny' of Sunday morning

Continued from p. 1

Christianity—that God loved people, for one thing. But he had also picked up the cultural ideas popular in China that Christianity was a white, colonialist religion brought in during the Opium Wars, he says.

When one of his classmates, who was ethnically Chinese like him, invited him to visit her church, he took the chance to experience it for himself. When he did, he says, he found much that was new and unfamiliar to him.

"My first impression was the people were friendly and the music was nice. I'm sure the preacher must've said something, but I don't remember what they said, which, I can only venture to guess, was because I didn't really understand what they said," he told the *Anglican Journal*.

Since then, he has moved to Canada, been baptized and—after a search for a church where he could feel spiritually at home—settled at St. Paul's Bloor Street in Toronto. But doing so, he says, involved a long process of finding a church where he felt comfortable asking the questions he needed to build familiarity with Christianity's rituals, practices and stories—and how they applied to his own life. He needed to figure out how these things fit into his own cultural and family background.

As the Anglican Church of Canada sets the church up for a renewed focus on evangelism through a discipleship and evangelism task force, it faces a changing society—one in which familiarity with Christianity is waning. More and more Canadians, like Liu, have never encountered church before. If the church wants to reach out to Canadians today, several specialists in evangelism tell the *Anglican Journal*, it will need to consider how to introduce the faith to these people.

According to Margie Patrick, a specialist on religious literacy in school curriculums for the Centre for Civic Religious Literacy, a nonprofit that promotes understanding and tolerance between spiritual traditions in Canada, there is little official research data on how familiar Canadians are with the basics of the Christian faith—but there are hints. Many clergy and academics, she says, say they are encountering more questions and less certainty from parishioners and students than before about Bible content, the diversity of denominations and theology. There's also census data that shows shifting religious demographics in Canada: the portion of the population reporting no religious affiliation doubled from 16.5 per cent in 2001 to 34.6 per cent in 2021. And Patrick points to a 2010 research paper from the *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* in which authors Joel Thiessen and Sarah Wilkins-Laflamme found that religiously unaffiliated parents are less likely to teach their children about religion or attend religious services. As a result, there is reason to suspect Canada's younger generations have a greater proportion of members with less exposure to religion in general and church in particular than their parents.

Meanwhile, Canada posted a record population growth of 1 million people in 2022, about 96 per cent of it in the form of international newcomers. Many immigrants—about 527,420, according to the 2021 census—belong to some Christian denomination already, but hundreds of



▲ Mark Elsdon-Dew, spokesperson for Holy Trinity Brompton, U.K.



▲ Jeremy McClung, transitional director of Wycliffe College's Institute of Evangelism, says his research suggests successful evangelism may start with friendships outside church.

PHOTO: MOUSSA FADDOUL

thousands belong to other faiths or no faith. Some, like Liu, come from cultures where Christianity is unusual or viewed with discomfort or suspicion.

To date, much of the successful evangelism in Canada is reaching people who have already encountered the faith, suggests research from a Wycliffe College study (*See Anglican Journal*, April, p. 2) of self-identified converts to Christianity in Canada over the past 50 years. Out of about 318 respondents, over half had already been to church before, and about a third said they did not find it difficult to start going because they had someone to go with them and help explain what was going on. The much smaller number of converts (about three per cent) who reported having trouble beginning to go to church, however, said their discomfort stemmed from not knowing what to do in the service, worrying that they would be singled out, and unexplained fear or emotional resistance to entering the church for the first time.

Those, moreover, are the experiences of people who ended up staying long enough to consider themselves Christians, notes Jeremy McClung, transitional director of the Institute of Evangelism at Wycliffe College and one of the two professors who conducted the study. What the study doesn't provide, McClung says, are the



▲ The Rev. David Deane, Roman Catholic professor of theology at the Atlantic School of Theology

PHOTO: JOHN RAE



▲ The Rev. Connie denBok compares the current situation to that during Christianity's early years as an underground religion.

PHOTO: CONTRIBUTED

◀ Margie Patrick says anecdotal evidence suggests there's more uncertainty about the content of faith among today's students.

PHOTO: SCOTT VANDE KRAATS

experiences of people outside the church—those who may have tried out Christianity and given up because it was unfamiliar, those who left the church because they felt it was harmful or irrelevant, or those who grew up outside the church and stayed there.

One piece of hope the study does offer, though, says McClung, is that among those who did convert to Christianity, the most frequent factor respondents named was a friend who was already Christian—much like the one who invited Liu to church. And when asked what these friends did that influenced them, the top three things respondents named were demonstrating the love of Christ, inviting them to church and living an attractive life—all things, McClung points out, that lay people can do as well as clergy. That might offer a strategy for reaching out to people who are uncomfortable with outreach from official representatives of the church, he says.

That discomfort is increasingly common among people outside the church, says the Rev. David Deane, a Roman Catholic associate professor of theology at the multidominational Atlantic School of Theology. Too often, he says, evangelism projects start from the assumption that all churches need to do is open their doors for people to come running to find out what

Continued on p. 11

Continued from p. 10
the faith has to offer. That mindset just doesn't work, says Deane.

"It still assumes that we are fantastic in the eyes of the world ... [but] people think we're crap," he says. He points to an Angus Reid survey in 2022 in which a narrow majority of respondents said Islam, evangelical Christianity and Roman Catholicism were damaging to Canadian society.

In one example of that sentiment, Patrick points to a controversial K-6 education curriculum unsuccessfully introduced in 2021 by the Conservative government of her home province of Alberta—often thought of as a sort of "Bible Belt" province. Many citizens and media across the province criticized the curriculum, calling it politically biased and culturally insensitive. But Patrick was surprised by one powerfully negative response—reactions on social media not just against the specific contents of the social studies curriculum as it applied to religious subject matter but to the idea of students learning about religion in school at all.

In today's cultural climate, says Deane, "The church is a toxic brand, based on one particular reading of history which sees the church as being the root of most evils." As a result, outreach from clergy offering to answer outsiders' questions or funneling potential converts through a catechism class may not be welcome. A better place to start may be with the people already in the pews, he says.

Deane, however, also believes it's not only the people outside the stained-glass windows who may be less familiar with theology and Scripture than the average Canadian of 50 years ago. He imagines a model in which churches invest in the faith formation of their lay members with the aim of giving them the tools they need to understand the beliefs, practices and history of Christianity better. Thus equipped, he says, they may find it easier to share their faith with friends and family in daily life. He doesn't believe that will take the form of preaching on a street corner or trying to make a direct pitch for a visit to church. But it might take the form of lay people living out their faith in a way that others might notice, he says, or of inviting friends to meet in coffee shops for a weekly book club to talk about things that matter to them.

The key, he says, is for these to be relationships based on sincere care and interest, not any kind of sales tactics or forced cheerfulness to educate, which immediately set off warning bells in the current cultural climate.

The Rev. Connie denBok, a United Church of Canada minister and fellow member of AST's faculty, suggests a similar idea of investing in the faith formation of existing Christians. She compares the current situation to that during Christianity's early years as an illegal underground religion. According to historian Alan Krieger's book, *The Patient Ferment of the Early Church*, she points out, the church was growing at a steady rate during those days—reaching up to 40 per cent per decade, by some estimates—despite all the opposition and persecution it faced—despite, she adds, the fact that it was what she would call "seeker-unfriendly."

"They would kick everybody out before

the Lord's Supper, so people started rumours that they were drinking actual blood. So why would they convert at that rate?" she asks. "I think it was the depth of character and [faith] formation in the Christians."

At the time, she says, Christians went through a slow catechesis that could take years before finally undergoing baptism only when they demonstrated the character of Christ. Rather than scaring people off with the big commitment, she says, that model had the effect of showcasing a deep dedication and an enthusiasm that proved contagious.

"If you believe that your life is a manifestation of Jesus ... that you're learning to reflect his character in a mystical sense, when [that] happens, people will catch glimpses of Jesus—not just the idea or the religion, but they will catch a glimpse of someone who is either compellingly attractive or you're not going to like the guy at all."

In at least one popular program, the strategy of working on the faith formation of existing Christians has already borne unexpected fruit.

Mark Elsdon-Dew is a spokesperson for Holy Trinity Brompton (HTB), a U.K. church whose success at planting new churches and welcoming newcomers has made it a model for growth initiatives in Anglican churches in Canada, such as Montreal's St. James. Elsdon-Dew says one of HTB's most successful programs, Alpha, originated as a way to encourage faith development among the church's existing members.

Alpha had originally been created as a discipleship course to introduce a wave of new converts in the 1970s and 1980s to the basics of the faith they had joined. But what HTB leader the Rev. Nicky Gumbel found when he took over running the Alpha course in 1990 was that it was attracting not just existing parishioners, but also newcomers who had heard about the course and ended up becoming Christians as a result of it.

Since its inception, the course has been duplicated in almost 70 countries across multiple denominations and enrolled nearly 29 million people. And at HTB, at least, those people overwhelmingly come to the course for the first time, he says, not because they saw a billboard or walked into the church off the street on a Sunday morning, but because they received a personal invitation from a friend.

Those relationships, says Deane, will remain the heart of any form of Christian outreach. And vitally, he says, preparing lay people to do that work need not—and should not—be motivated by a desire to funnel people into the pews or pump up a parish's Sunday numbers.

Instead, he says, "We can begin work on that prior to and leading up to the Sunday [visit], whether that is relationships, water cooler talk," he says. If Christians don't think beyond attendance numbers, he says, "we don't share the good news that despite the shittiness of the world, hope is possible. Despite the way things are, love is real. Despite the way things are, people have a purpose. These are things that can be shared no matter where we are. But it does involve a little bit shaking the tyranny of seeing everything as focused on a Sunday morning." ■



The Rev. Grace Pritchard Burson leads her workshop, "Getting over the bridge: children's formation that paves the way for adult faith."

PHOTO: EILEEN SCULLY

Conference explores discipleship and church vitality

Sean Frankling
STAFF WRITER

Mississauga

During You Are Leaven, an April conference on faith formation and discipleship organized by General Synod's Faith, Worship and Ministry committee, a team of delegates from the diocese of Rupert's Land told the *Anglican Journal's* reporter they would introduce a motion at their next diocesan synod to promote discipleship practices among diocesan leaders. The motion, said Bishop of Rupert's Land Geoffrey Woodcroft, would require anyone elected to leadership or serving on a diocesan council to sign a pledge to be a lifelong learner in the subject of discipleship.

The plan, he said, was part of a running theme at April's conference: taking action to use discipleship as a way to revitalize the church.

"It is so ultimately refreshing to be a part of a conference that is proactive," he said. "There is much hope, but there is also this unlocking of great creativity and imagination."

Conference attendees discussed definitions of spiritual formation, talked about how to promote it and participated in hands-on workshops teaching skills designed for them to take home and share in their home parishes. There were workshops on spiritual journaling; applying Examen, a method of prayerful reflection and gratitude, to meditate on the outcomes of church meetings and policy planning; and on improvisational theatre, among other topics.

The Rev. Monica Green, a former actor and current spiritual director at Christ's Church Cathedral in Hamilton, Ont., ran the improv workshop. The goal, she said, was to teach participants how to listen meaningfully and build on one another's ideas in ways that leave space for others to push the story forward further. She was inspired, Green said, by the idea of British theologian N.T. Wright that in order to live out God's plan for the world, Christians should think of themselves as improvising what comes next based on the story presented in Scripture.

By keeping these principles in mind as

they return to the work of the church, she said, clergy and laypeople can seek ways to apply them in building the church's future as a shared story.

The title of the conference, You Are Leaven, was aimed at reminding attendees that big changes can come about from small things, like yeast worked into bread dough, said the Rev. Jessica Schaap, one of the event's organizers and missionary for Christian formation in the diocese of New Westminster. That symbol represents the presence of living things—both people and spiritual energy—at the core of Christianity and the potential for cultivating those things to result in expansion and growth. It's also a reminder that these things take time.

"I really believe God loves [to use] the invisible and small to change the world," said Schaap.

By investing in spiritual formation and deepening the discipleship of clergy, lay leaders and parishioners already in the community, she said, the church has the opportunity to create people who naturally and organically well up with good news to share. "Just like when we would go to a really good restaurant and be like, 'Oh my goodness, you have to try their risotto,'" she said, when people have meaningful experiences in their spiritual lives, it shows and they talk about it to people close to them.

As the conference concluded, several of the attendees told the *Journal* that as well as the tools they had picked up in the workshops and the concepts they'd gone over in discussion, a main takeaway from the weekend was simply the energy of those present.

"I'm taking home renewed joy and enthusiasm about the life of the church—that people are the life of the church, not the programs, not the buildings. And that there's something real still happening," said Leah Postman, a spiritual director in the diocese of New Westminster.

"If we have our own connection to that God of our understanding, that's going to spill over. We don't have to have a program to get people to understand. If we can feed our own heart, that's going to feed others." ■

Decolonizing hopes emerged at 1963 Anglican Congress—but Global North still dominates Communion, MRI at 60 conference hears

Matthew Puddister
STAFF WRITER

Held as a wave of decolonization swept the former British Empire, the 1963 Toronto Anglican Congress proclaimed the commitment of the worldwide Anglican Communion to a new spirit of “mutual responsibility and interdependence” (MRI). More than 60 years later, however, many Anglican scholars say despite some progress, these hopes have not been achieved—with richer developed countries of the Global North continuing to dominate the Communion.

The legacy of the 1963 Congress was the focus of MRI at 60, an international conference held April 12-13 at St. Paul’s Bloor Street in Toronto to mark the event’s 60th anniversary. The Canadian Church Historical Society (CCHS) hosted the conference, which was originally planned for 2023 before being delayed. At least 40 attended in person and more than 67 online.

The conference was held in honour of Bishop Terry Brown, who was CCHS president until his death on Easter weekend. Brown worked as Asia/Pacific mission coordinator for the Anglican Church of Canada from 1985 to 1996 and was bishop of the Pacific diocese of Malaita from 1996 to 2008. Canon Mark Chapman, professor of the history of theology at the University of Oxford and keynote speaker, said Brown “in many ways was a living embodiment of mutual responsibility and interdependence.”

A call prepared for the 1963 Congress, written by then-Archbishop of Canterbury Michael Ramsay and the Communion’s 17 primates, explained the concept of MRI to delegates. “It is a platitude to say that in our time, areas of the world which have been thought of as dependent and secondary are suddenly striding to the center of the stage, in a new and breathtaking independence and self-reliance,” the document said. “Equally has this happened to the Church... It is now irrelevant to talk of ‘giving’ and ‘receiving’ churches. The keynotes of our time are equality, interdependence, mutual responsibility.”

Anglicanism and imperialism

In his keynote address, Chapman compared the 1963 gathering to the pan-Anglican Congress of 1908. Charting the shift in Anglican perspectives from the height of British imperialism to the era of decolonization, Chapman reflected upon the meaning of Anglicanism itself.

Unlike other global Christian denominations that grew out of the Protestant Reformation, Chapman said, Anglicanism did not develop a distinctive understanding of the Christian faith. The Church of England’s 39 Articles of Religion, for example, did not acquire the same status as the Augsburg Confession, the primary confession of faith in the Lutheran Church, and were never binding on lay people.

Anglicanism’s identity came primarily from its status as England’s national church, the scholar said. But its absence of a confessional statement of faith became a problem as Anglicanism spread beyond England. “Instead of [having] a confession



PHOTO: CANADIAN CHURCHMAN/GENERAL SYNOD ARCHIVES

The 1963 Toronto Anglican Congress, held at Maple Leaf Gardens, called on the Anglican Communion to grow in “mutual responsibility and interdependence in the body of Christ”.



PHOTOS: MATTHEW PUDDISTER

The Rev. Charlie Bell (left) and former Bishop of Southern Malawi James Tengatenga discuss their respective papers during the MRI at 60 conference.

or a set of canons, to be Anglican was to be in relationship—relationship with the Archbishop of Canterbury” as the primate of all England, Chapman said.

Defining Anglicanism in this way “introduces an inevitable element of Englishness, and thus the legacy of colonialism, into the very heart of Anglicanism.” The effort by 19th century Anglican missionaries to spread Christianity, Chapman said, “was intimately tied up with a particular perception of civilization carried by the so-called Anglo-Saxon race who were populating the colonies.”

Such attitudes persisted to the 1908 London Congress, a massive event that for the first time included Indigenous laity and clergy from across the Communion. A dominant figure in Anglicanism at this time, Chapman said, was Bishop Henry Montgomery, general secretary of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel and father of Second World War general Bernard Montgomery. Chapman described the elder Montgomery as “a kind of Anglican foreign secretary” and “undoubted apologist for the British Empire. He thought clergy were officers in an imperial army.”

Despite imperialist and racist language that pervaded the 1908 congress, Chapman said, “there was already a strong degree of ambiguity about the relationship between Anglicanism and British imperialism.” On the one hand, figures like University of Cambridge master Stuart Alexander Donaldson displayed open racism, distinguishing between “higher” and “lower” races. On the other hand, Chapman said, there was

also “a recognition that Christianity was not English and Anglicanism did not just present the God of Greater Britain.”

Susil Rudra, the first Indian principal of St. Stephen’s College, Delhi, attended the 1908 congress and spoke about the need to “Indigenize” the gospel and for more Indian clergy and liturgy. Reginald Copleston, then bishop of Calcutta and metropolitan of India, spoke about the dangers of missionaries feeling superior and the need for greater humility in the presence of Indigenous peoples.

The decades that followed that gathering saw massive changes including two world wars, the relative weakening of Britain and ascendance of the United States; the onset of the Cold War and declarations of independence by colonial countries across the world. Old bonds across the Anglican Communion, Chapman said, seemed inadequate in the face of rapid decolonization.

By the 1960s, Chapman said, many of the fastest-growing churches were in places that had or would soon become independent from Britain. The building up of local church leadership became a growing concern.

Figures such as Bishop Stephen Bayne, an American who served as the Anglican Communion’s first executive officer from 1960 to 1964, observed that mission could no longer be about “impressing the local population with riches,” Chapman said—which “amounted to an implicit questioning of the so-called civilizing impact of mission.” Bayne wrote an introduction to the MRI call at the 1963 Congress stressing the need for dialogue with churches in the ex-colonial countries.

In the end, the Congress endorsed and committed itself to the call for the Anglican Communion to grow in “mutual responsibility and interdependence in the body of Christ.”

Colonial legacy seen persisting

The bulk of April’s conference saw presenters discuss papers they had written on the 1963 Congress, MRI and its impact. During two sessions, presenters said many key goals of the 1963 Congress had still not been fulfilled and called for a more thorough decolonization across the Anglican Communion.

The Rev. Charlie Bell, college lecturer in medicine at Girton College, Cambridge, said the Anglican Communion had failed to address the legacy of colonialism, which he called a “scandal of history,” in its global structures. “We face an urgent need to reimagine our Instruments of Communion [in a way] that would allow the entire church to break free of the colonial mold,” Bell said.

He offered the example of the proposed Anglican Congress—a meeting of not just bishops, but clergy and laity from across the Communion, which the 2022 Lambeth Conference called on the church to convene. Bell said any such congress would need an intentional focus on who is present and why, on “whose voices are being listened to and on the ecclesiological positioning of that congress itself.”

The congress should take “an Anglican expression of relational unity in bishop, in synod, as a starting point and not the creation of unity as a goal.”

Former Bishop of Southern Malawi James Tengatenga, professor of global Anglicanism at the University of the South, Sewanee, Tennessee, said the Toronto Congress marked “the emergence of a decolonial Anglican Communion. It was suggestive of each region taking its rightful place and role in the obedience to the mission of God.” Yet, Tengatenga added, today “the hegemony is still northern and the tendency is schismatic.”

Even after the 1963 Congress, Tengatenga said, both progressives and conservative Westerners in the Communion often viewed Africans as having no agency. He cited a 1998 article in the *Church of England Newspaper* on Bishop Jack Spong of The Episcopal Church, who had a reputation as an “arch-progressive.” The article quoted Spong as saying Africans were “just a step up from witchcraft”—a stance Tengatenga said betrayed a sense of coloniality even among the most progressive bishops and caused pushback from African bishops. Since the 1998 Lambeth Conference, he said, Anglicans in the Global South have increasingly viewed themselves as a distinct “theo-political” group.

The Rev. Raghadi Khobo, chaplain at St. Mary’s School, Waverley in Johannesburg, South Africa, said despite widespread associations of Anglican Church with colonialism, in her view “Anglicanism is inherently decolonial.” She pointed to the origins of the Church of England in separating from the Roman Catholic Church, which showed “a church and society looking to create space for each form of existence in the one holy catholic church.”

Khobo drew parallels to African independence movements and local expressions of Christianity, as well as the *Book of Common Prayer’s* emphasis on the need for worship and scriptures in vernacular languages. Khobo also cited the shift of the Anglican Church of Southern Africa “from a servant of those in power to serving the powerless” in opposing apartheid.

The conference was funded by the CCHS, the Anglican Foundation of Canada and the Historical Society of the Episcopal Church. ■

LETTERS ▶

Priest's reputation 'ruined' by reporting of minor offence

Canon David Harrison ("Toronto priest, *Journal* contributor found guilty of public indecency," April, p. 8) cannot be the first priest to have committed a minor offence that in no way involved his church duties. Did the *Journal* give such prominent coverage to all and each of their minor offenses? This is the kind of yellow journalism we associate with U.K. and U.S. tabloids, not a well-regarded Anglican newspaper in Canada.

I hope the *Anglican Journal* will thoughtfully reconsider its actions and the ramifications. By publishing this article, you have ruined this man's reputation without just cause.

Cynthia Reyes
Former journalist
Clarington, Ont.

Article showed harshness instead of compassion

As a priest of the church, I was disturbed by the tenor of the article regarding Canon David Harrison. I strongly feel the approach taken is lacking in sensitivity and compassion for a priest who has acknowledged his struggles and the mistake that led to the legal judgement.



IMAGE: KILROY79

I wish that the article, whilst acknowledging the offence, could have focused on the humanity of this priest openly acknowledging his struggle and seeking therapy. Part of the healing journey and dealing with mental illness is facing up to the darkness and helplessness one confronts, and he has done just that.

Geoffrey Howson
Bocabec, N.B.

Coverage not warranted by priest's 'regrettable error'

I was disheartened by the content and tone of the piece regarding Canon David Harrison.

When I was 15, I was a victim of exploitation. I had the courage to tell the police and the perpetrator was found guilty. I am sharing this so it is understood I am concerned that criminals face justice and the Church holds them accountable. Where are the reports in the *Journal* of those who are found guilty of

crimes against the vulnerable? If you need stories, look under the rug they've been swept under and don't use this innocent mistake as an attempt to make it look like we have transparency.

I feel an apology in the *Journal* would be an appropriate next step, not only for David but also for the readers and for actual victims because this article belittles our experiences.

Name withheld

Priest should not have been inhibited

In inhibiting Canon David Harrison, unfortunately, it appears that our bishop has neglected the divine commandment bestowed upon each of us: "And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God," along with the decree, "Let all that you do be done in love."

Canon Harrison is well-known for his compassion and support for the poor and marginalized. Compassion, forgiveness, and love ought to inspire each of us, Bishop Andrew included.

Bonnie Booth
Toronto, Ont.

Many good female candidates for next AoC—but gender should not be determining factor

Of course it is eminently reasonable to contemplate a woman being appointed as Archbishop of Canterbury ("Next up: a female Archbishop of Canterbury?" April, p.1). There are many accomplished female clerics, including serving bishops, throughout the Anglican Communion, although one imagines that the Crown Nominations Commission will focus mainly on candidates from within the English church.

Given the challenges facing the church, both in the U.K. and worldwide, any new appointment to Canterbury must be the most qualified candidate available. And while gender may be a merit criterion at play, it should not be the determining factor in this critical appointment.

David Collins
Victoria, B.C.

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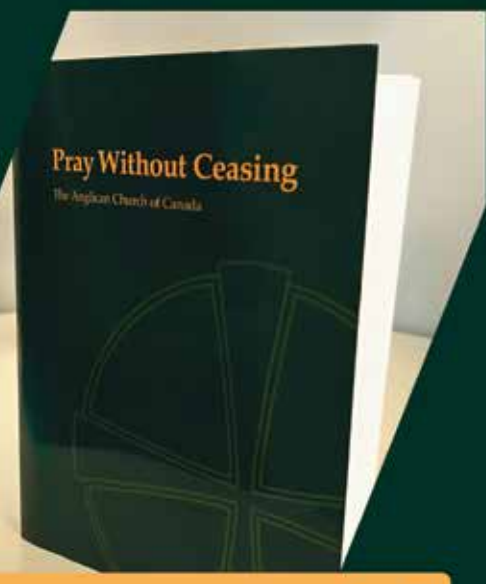
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BIBLE READINGS

DAY READING

- 1 Isaiah 32:1-8
- 2 Habakkuk 1
- 3 Habakkuk 2
- 4 Habakkuk 3
- 5 Psalm 48
- 6 2 Corinthians 12:1-10
- 7 Mark 6:1-13
- 8 Amos 6
- 9 Amos 7
- 10 Amos 8
- 11 Obadiah
- 12 Psalm 24
- 13 2 Samuel 6:1-11
- 14 2 Samuel 6:12-23
- 15 Jeremiah 23:1-15
- 16 Jeremiah 23:16-32
- 17 Jeremiah 23:33-24:10
- 18 Psalm 89:1-18
- 19 Psalm 89:19-37
- 20 Psalm 89:38-52
- 21 Mark 6:30-52
- 22 Ruth 1
- 23 Ruth 2
- 24 Ruth 3
- 25 Acts 12:1-17
- 26 Ruth 4
- 27 2 Samuel 11:1-17
- 28 2 Samuel 11:18-12:6
- 29 2 Samuel 12:7-25
- 30 John 6:1-15
- 31 John 6:16-34



BIBLE READINGS

DAY READING

- 1 John 6:35-51
- 2 John 6:52-71
- 3 Psalm 78:1-20
- 4 Psalm 78:21-37
- 5 Psalm 78:38-55
- 6 Daniel 7:1-14
- 7 Psalm 78:56-72
- 8 Psalm 49
- 9 Psalm 34:1-10
- 10 Psalm 34:11-22
- 11 2 Samuel 18:1-18
- 12 2 Samuel 18:19-33
- 13 1 Kings 3:1-15
- 14 Proverbs 9:1-12
- 15 Galatians 4:1-14
- 16 Galatians 4:15-31
- 17 Galatians 5:1-15
- 18 Galatians 5:16-6:10
- 19 2 Chronicles 5:2-6:2
- 20 2 Chronicles 6:3-13
- 21 1 Kings 8:22-40
- 22 1 Kings 8:41-61
- 23 Ephesians 6:10-24
- 24 Luke 22:24-30
- 25 Joshua 24:1-15
- 26 Joshua 24:16-33
- 27 Song of Songs 1:1-2:1
- 28 Song of Songs 2:2-15
- 29 Mark 6:14-29
- 30 Song of Songs 2:16-3:11
- 31 Song of Songs 4



BIBLE READINGS

DAY READING

- 1 Mark 6:53-7:13
- 2 Mark 7:14-37
- 3 Song of Songs 5
- 4 Song of Songs 6
- 5 Song of Songs 7
- 6 Song of Songs 8
- 7 Psalm 125
- 8 Isaiah 35
- 9 Psalm 116
- 10 Mark 8:1-13
- 11 Mark 8:14-26
- 12 James 1:1-18
- 13 James 1:19-2:13
- 14 John 19:13-30
- 15 James 2:14-3:5a
- 16 James 3:5b-4:10
- 17 James 4:11-5:6
- 18 James 5:7-20
- 19 Jeremiah 11:1-14
- 20 Jeremiah 11:15-23
- 21 Mark 2:13-22
- 22 Psalm 54
- 23 Mark 9:30-50
- 24 Esther 6:1-7:2
- 25 Esther 7:3-8:2
- 26 Esther 9:11-23
- 27 Numbers 11:4-30
- 28 Revelation 12
- 29 Daniel 10:1-11
- 30 Daniel 10:12-11:2a

THE
INTERVIEW ▶

▲ Ryan Swanson (top) and Tyler Thompson

PHOTOS: THE CHOSEN

The Chosen: Writers approach task with ‘fear and trembling, but also anticipation’

Sean Frankling
STAFF WRITER

The TV series *The Chosen* adapts the bedrock of Christianity as a high-production-value drama. To do so, it dives deep into the text, lifting key moments from Scripture but also attempting to flesh out the characters, setting and political realities of the first century A.D. That work, the show’s creators say, involves a careful process of bringing sainted and beloved characters like Mary Magdalene and Simon Peter to life in ways audiences can relate to while ensuring their portrayals remain true to the historical accounts of their lives.

Earlier this year, as fans were awaiting an official announcement on when the episodes of Season 4—which premiered in movie theatres across North America this winter—will be available to watch at home, *The Chosen*’s writers, Ryan Swanson and Tyler Thompson, sat down with the Anglican Journal’s Sean Frankling to discuss the creative process that goes into adapting Scripture for entertainment and faithfulness.

This interview has been edited for length; a longer version can be found at anglicanjournal.com.

How do you approach an adaptation with this much historical gravity behind it?

Tyler: With fear and trembling, but also with anticipation that there’s a reason these words have been popular for thousands of years and have shaped people’s lives and have shaped geopolitical history for years. You can guarantee going in that this is really strong material we’re working with, so it’s going to hold up. But then it’s strong material on the page, which is one medium, and we are adapting it for television, which is a very different medium with different needs. And so there is this adjustment that has to be made.

Ryan: The reason we’re being tasked with adapting it is because it is so significant. It is a story that has not only stood the test of time, but it’s been told and retold in oral histories and written very plainly in all its perfection on paper for the world to see. So we certainly don’t approach it lightly. That said, we think in fact its strength is the thing that gives us freedom.

Tell me more about that strength.

Ryan: It is written, these are the words of God laid out perfectly as only his proxies could. And we believe that it is the greatest story ever told. Our job is to point people to it, never to try to replace it. And when we have the honour to portray something exactly as it’s written, we do so with extreme fealty. Our work editorializing the characters who might’ve been present or otherwise affected by the events that the Bible documents is always intended to be in service of the stories contained in the document.



PHOTO: COURTESY OF THE CHOSEN

In this still from Season 3, Jesus of Nazareth (Jonathan Roumie) lays hands on Veronica (Zhaleh Vossough), healing her from a bleeding disorder that would have marked her as unclean in first-century Judea.

How is this different from adapting a novel or comic book?

Tyler: I think anyone who’s familiar with, say, Marvel or *Star Wars* knows that there’s a thing about toxic fandom—about the way fans can take ownership, or supposed ownership, of intellectual property and be like, “Oh, you ruined my childhood,” or “You ruined my impression of these characters.” The thing about the Bible is in terms of its “fandom,” it makes those groups look like Quakers. People feel so strongly about the Bible. People have organized their entire lives around it. There are massive schisms in the church writ large over interpretation.

And so we are in the business of getting down to the original text and trying to burn off the waxy centuries of interpretation to “here is what the characters said according to the Bible, and what would that mean in its time and in its context?”

Our work is different from that of pastors. We don’t have to make it apply as a sermon illustration to a little league or to something that happened in your marriage.

Your portrayal focuses heavily on the personal significance of miracles to characters like Simon. How do you draw a balance between the significance of those moments to the characters and their theological importance?

Tyler: The greatest gift to us as writers on this project is the fact that these first-century Jewish people would be so richly steeped in Old Testament theology, Old Testament texts. We don’t have to educate our characters about what’s in the Old Testament; we have to educate modern audiences. They tend to be the ones who wouldn’t really remember the story of Moses putting the serpent on the pole. We have to remind them maybe by a flashback. But Jesus can say to

Nicodemus, “just as Moses raised up the serpent,” and immediately Nicodemus understands, because he has that whole thing memorised.

Ryan: What we can do is to show how this huge moment might’ve impacted the central characters it involves and what it could have meant to them on a personal and, more importantly, an emotional level in that moment. What we hope is that this moment becomes so personal and so emotional that viewers want to dig into what it meant and they might in fact be more open to the theological context of these moments and how they echo what the Old Testament told us would happen. So I think that the hope of using anything biblical is to point people back to the Bible.

The Chosen is full of characters for whom there’s little defining information in the gospels. How do you know when you’re going too far to extrapolate someone’s character?

Ryan: We usually pick a place in the story that we want to write to and we figure out how to get a character there and also fulfil the base level requirement for good TV. And that is, how do I get you to Minute 5?

How do I get you to care about this character or to relate to this character or to sympathise with this character? We try all three things to draw an audience into feeling that they have some way to see the character that we’re trying to portray. So we looked at things like Simon’s behaviour down the road after he’s been following Jesus for literally years at this point—still contradicting him, still speaking out of turn, still getting it wrong, still acting out, cutting ears off. And we backtrack. Really, to that moment, what we were trying to build to was a much simpler narrative point: Why the heck was he fishing all night? And so we started to build backwards [to his debts].

Now, I have the good fortune

of being a screenwriter who loves God, but I work with two guys who are steeped in the Bible in different ways, and Tyler is a scholar himself. But we still don’t rely on each other. We go to a group of biblical consultants who come from an array of ecumenical backgrounds. We’re not so full of ourselves as to believe that ours is the only perspective on this material.

And sometimes we disagree. Our goal is more than anything to see these people as the human beings that they were when Jesus found them. And so I will never say we got it right, not in those terms, not about these things. We hope that Simon proves, as he did in life on our show, to be so much more than the man Jesus found. And we hope not to offend or distract, but we want to challenge people.

Tyler: We start with the Bible, then our drafts get shipped off to literally Israel, Africa, South America, India. We have people all over the world reading these scripts to bring a global perspective, especially the perspective of the Global South.

When has an extrapolation gone too far? There’s maybe three questions we would ask. What we have are descriptions of action within the Bible; we have epistles; and we have church tradition. So what actions are listed? What did they say in their own words? What does church tradition tell us?

Another question is how plausible something would be within the religious and political culture. For instance, we’ll write these Roman characters who are not mentioned in the Bible, necessarily, by name, but are maybe composites of what we understand to be the ruling power of the time. There’s so much information on the Roman Empire that we can use. People say, “Oh, I can’t find Atticus in my Bible.” And no, you can’t, but you can find him everywhere in the New Testament as it relates to the presence of Rome in these people’s lives. ■

“We believe that it is the greatest story ever told. Our job is to point people to it, never to try to replace it.”