



THE MESSENGER



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Slave Lake Ecumenical Parish Tells Christmas Story



The Ecumenical Parish of Slave Lake held an Advent Carols and Readings service on December 17. Members of the congregation were invited to dress as Nativity characters.

PWRDF Reps invited to support one another in good work

International aid and development are not “top of mind” terms for most people. In fact, these issues are sometimes given such a negative precedence that we easily turn our backs to them.

There is so much need here in Canada, we question sending money abroad. There is a shortage of affordable housing and the number of people without adequate housing continues to increase; our cost of living and inflation continue to rise; people are forced to choose between paying the rent or buying groceries; our healthcare system is overwhelmed.

It is true, we have our problems. There is great need here in Canada. As individuals, parishes, dioceses, and a national church we support initiatives addressing these issues.

But it is also important to recognise and acknowledge that we are impacted by global issues. Around the world, 45 per cent of child



JEFF HANGER
PWRDF Rep
Diocese of Edmonton

deaths are due to hunger and related causes. There are currently more than 30 million refugees. The impacts of climate change and natural disasters further cripple less developed countries. Significant changes in global trade have massive ramifications at the local level.

We pray about global issues in our parishes on Sundays. And it is critical to understand these global trends to respond as a global community.

I became the Primate’s World Relief and Development

Fund (PWRDF) rep for the Edmonton diocese, because the PWRDF strengthens communities here in Canada and around the world through local partnerships on the ground. Whether by addressing Indigenous land and water issues; offering counselling to people following natural disasters; providing emergency food relief, water or medical supplies; or forming farmer co-

“He who oppresses a poor man insults his Maker, but he who is kind to the needy honours him.”
Proverbs 14:31

ops, the PWRDF demonstrates an effective, and very often life-changing response.

To help your parish stay connected with the work of the PWRDF on the ground, I invite parish reps, and anyone who is interested in learning more about the PWRDF, to the Synod Office on Saturday, February 10, from 10 am to 1 pm. This will be an opportunity to meet other parish reps, receive resources for your church, hear from PWRDF staff and enjoy lunch together. RSVP by February 7 on the diocesan website: <https://edmonton.anglican.ca/events/>

I am looking forward to learning more about how I can support you and your parish to build a greater understanding about the PWRDF’s response to global issues. Please email me for more information: pwrdf@edmonton.anglican.ca



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Support for safe, affirming and fully inclusive parishes

MARGARET GLIDDEN
Edmonton Editor

Members of Queerly Beloved, a working group of the Diocese of Edmonton Social Justice Committee, hosted a recent Clergy Day in the parish of St. Timothy's, Edmonton. Through these continuing education days, Queerly Beloved is supporting church communities to become safe spaces for 2SLGBTQIA+ followers of the Jesus way.

As the Rev. Clare L. Stewart, rector of St. Timothy's and a member of Queerly Beloved, reminded clergy in her presentation on "The Church and Human Sexuality: Queer Christians & the Anglican Church," the church has not always been a safe place for 2SLGBTQIA+ people.

However, as the 10th Goal of *Finding Our Way: Discerning a Strategic Path for the Diocese of Edmonton* states, parishes of the Edmonton diocese "will affirm and declare publicly, intentionally and explicitly our commitment to the welcome, safety and full access of siblings in the 2SLGBTQIA+ communities within our churches..."

Queerly Beloved has made available to parishes, via the diocesan website, resources such as the "Building an Inclusive Church Toolkit," and "Room for All Blessings for All" Sunday school curriculum. To date, eight parishes have identified themselves as affirming on the website.

"It is hugely important for queer individuals and couples to be recognised by their faith communities," says the Rev. Mark Vigrass, a deacon at St. George's, Edmonton, and chair of Queerly Beloved. "These aren't easy conversations to have in some parishes, but they are necessary if we are to continue moving forward."

"It's easy for people to form an opinion in the abstract," says Vigrass who has been married to Manny Panera since 2015. "We don't all have to think the same way theologically, but we can still get to know Christians who are Queer."

Vigrass shared with the clergy community that he did not feel accepted by his conservative United church when he came out as a gay man in his twenties. He spent many years "in the wilderness" until a



Clare Stewart, a member of the Queerly Beloved working group, and rector of St. Timothy's, Edmonton, presents at Clergy Day.

gay friend in Montreal suggested he give the Anglican church a try.

He became an active member of Ascension Church in Montreal and was confirmed as an adult, in 1991, at All Saints', Regina. In Edmonton, he served as a deacon at St. Patrick's and, most recently, St. George's.

Because of the church's history, Vigrass says it is also important for affirming parishes to be

"public, intentional and explicit" in their welcome, by making safe church declarations on their websites and social media channels and displaying rainbow flags and signs.

"When I go to a church and I see a sticker and pride flag in the window, it's like a touchstone for me," he says. "I feel love."

Queerly Beloved provides "Safe Space" decals to parishes to display in their windows. If your parish would like a decal to signal to Queer people that you are an affirming worship community, please get in touch with RJ Chambers at the Synod Office:

churched@edmonton.anglican.ca / 780-439-7344.

The Rev. Michael Coren, assistant curate at St. Luke's, Burlington in the Anglican Diocese of Niagara, was invited to speak at Clergy Day and later gave an evening lecture. He shared how a change of heart and mind led him to abandon Catholicism and embrace Anglicanism.

Coren, whose father was Jewish, though he was not raised in a faith community, became a Catholic as an adult. However, two events in 2014 -- an evangelical Christian backlash against World Vision for hiring Christians in same-sex marriages in its US offices, and the Ugandan president's legislation for life imprisonment for gay sex -- caused him to question the Catholic church's teachings about homosexuality.

Coren began intentionally reaching out to Queer people and "the more I learned, the more I felt I had got it wrong." He is now regarded as a Christian champion of equal marriage, same-sex blessings, and the full affirmation of 2SLGBTQIA+ people in the church.



At left, deacon Mark Vigrass, chair of the Queerly Beloved working group; Michael Coren, an Anglican priest, author, and guest presenter at Clergy Day.

Barrhead community to restore historic church damaged by fire

BRENDA HARRIS-BARON
Barrhead

On December 7, 2023, it is believed that an arsonist(s) set fire to two churches both with significant history and affiliation with the Anglican Diocese of Edmonton and to the community of Barrhead.

St. Mary Abbots, Barrhead and St. Aidan's Glenreagh were established in 1911 and 1913 respectively, by the Reverend W.L. Seymour Dallas, as part of the Paddle River Mission.

St. Mary Abbots was named after Dallas' home parish in Kensington, England. The church was built in 1912 east of the current town of Barrhead. With the coming of the railroad, the church was moved into Barrhead, in 1928, to make way for a railway siding.

A new church was built, in 1966, and ownership of the original St. Mary Abbots was transferred to the Barrhead Historical Society. The building was moved once again to its final home near Thunder Lake Provincial Park, 12 miles west of Barrhead.



Renamed the Pioneer Memorial Church and dedicated to the area's pioneers, it was open to the public and hosted many weddings and get-togethers during its 50+ years as a community



church. Unfortunately, the building could not withstand the ravages of fire and was reduced to ashes.

Continued on page 8.

Faithful people in time of significant change

- Proclaim the Gospel
- Make Disciples
- Further the Kingdom
- The Five Marks of Mission

These are our proclaimed core values and practices as a diocese. We are a Gospel people who invite people into transformative relationship with God in Jesus Christ and who seek to partner with God for the renewal of the world for peace and justice. It is a profound and life-giving call that we have embraced.

But how do we live that out here in the Diocese of Edmonton practically? As you know well in your parishes, we live in a time of great challenge. It is a hard time to be a church: we are in a time of transition. Many of our parishes have financial and population challenges. Many of our parishes are asking about the future. We have core stability in the diocese for the present moment, but we are also aware that there will be significant demographic challenges to our churches if nothing is done to



Bishop STEPHEN LONDON
Diocese of Edmonton

address them. What are we doing to help us discern what it means to be faithful in this challenging time? So far, we are addressing this in three ways, each a step in discernment and listening to the Holy Spirit.

In the first step, I, as the bishop, went quickly to visit all of the parishes. If I couldn't get to a parish on a Sunday, I went during the week to visit with the parish leadership, to get to know them, hear about the parish and to pray together. This was an informal listening and relationship building process. I want all of the parishes to know that we are a family of parishes.

The second step was the creation of the Finding Our Way document. It started with my summary of what I had heard when I visited all the parishes. I sent it out to the diocese and invited feedback, and from that feedback we created Finding Our Way as an articulation of

the areas we were going to put our energy into.

For the third step, the Executive Council is looking to create a strategic plan for the diocese that will guide us for the next several years to come. Our desire is for mission and ministry to be active and vibrant across our diocese. The question is often about making the best use of our resources and how we answer the call that God has put on our hearts. At the end of January, we are looking at hiring a consultant to help us with this work. The consultant will help us to check in with parishes and evaluate how we are doing and what needs help. We will look at our programming and how we utilise the Synod Office. We will continue to look at our policies and structures.

We want to be poised to be able to proclaim the Gospel in this diocese for decades to come. My invitation to you is to intentionally pray for this process moving forward. This is a large listening exercise; we are listening to the Holy Spirit as we move forward. It is a challenging place to be. It is an exciting place to be.

Blessings,
+ Steve

Be certain: God understands us through Christ

From Christmas to Ash Wednesday, we are in the season of Epiphany. Why was it named this, and what does it mean? The Cambridge English Dictionary provides this definition: *Epiphany: a moment when you suddenly feel that you understand, or suddenly become conscious of, something that is very important to you.* Epiphany comes from the Greek word epiphaneia, meaning "appearance" or "manifestation." Epiphany is when we recognise the manifestation of God incarnate to the world, and to our individual lives.



Bishop DAVID GREENWOOD
Diocese of Athabasca

are. Christ experienced pain, sorrow, despair, yearning, as well as joy, happiness, sharing, fellowship. Whenever we need help for anything, we can be assured, as Paul says, that Christ will understand us. We can confidently approach the throne of *overwhelming love*, knowing that we shall not be rejected nor dismissed. But rather, we will be acknowledged and are known. If we think, "Oh God, you just won't understand," hopefully, we hear Christ respond back, "I have been



That we have an entire, admittedly short season focused on becoming conscious of the manifestation of God underscores that this is an important concept to grasp. What does it mean that God appeared in the world? Why is this so important to us? Paul wrote: "we do not have a high priest incapable of sympathising with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in every way just as we are, yet without sin. Therefore, let us confidently approach the throne of grace to receive mercy and find grace whenever we need help."

God understands us. Everything we have gone through, every weakness we have struggled with. Christ was tempted just as we

there. In fact, I am going through it again, with you. I understand totally."

This is part of the overwhelming love of God. Not only did Christ die on the cross to give Himself up for us, once and for all, but He gives Himself to us every day, in everything we are going through. Christ is with you always, reaching out to you in healing, in acceptance, in love. It is important you understand this. Christ also challenges us, yes, when we stray from His way of love. But, He always accepts our turning back to His way, which is why the next season, Lent, is also important.

The various seasons of the church year are created so we can spend time mining the depths

of God's relationship with us. May you know the depth of God in your being. God in the world, God all around. God who knows your very thought, everything you say and do, and lives it with you. God who asks you to represent him. As Paul also wrote: "I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor heavenly rulers, nor things that are present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." May you understand this. Understand it so well that you live it out in your life. All glory be to God.

Amen.
Be blessed in Christ!
+ David

We welcome letters to the editor, news, stories and book reviews (max 500 words), event notices and high resolution photos (min 1 MB, 200 dpi).

Submissions are due one month prior to the issue for which they are intended, for example: FEBRUARY 2 for MARCH 2024.

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++Justin Welby to participate in Bible Reading Marathon

The Rev. Deacon PETER CLARKE
Athabasca Diocese

In just a few weeks time it will be the start of Lent (Wednesday, February 14), which will run until March 28. For the past few years, the Diocese of Athabasca has held an online Bible Reading Marathon, which will start this year on Palm/Passion Sunday, March 24, at 1 pm, and run continuously, 24 hours a day, until Thursday, March 28, at 5 pm.

This diocesan endeavour, which is now a worldwide event, was started at St. Mark's Church in High Prairie approximately 20 years prior to the diocese extending the reach of the event.

The Bible Marathon runs for a period of 100 hours. Bishop Greenwood starts the marathon off for the first hour. Whoever has booked the second hour will continue reading their Bible where Bishop Greenwood ends.

Thus, the marathon continues with each successive reader starting at the point where the previous reader ended, until the

whole Bible is read, generally sometime on Maundy Thursday.

At this point, we re-read the New Testament until 4 pm when Bishop Greenwood will read for again to conclude the event.

We do encourage participants to read from their own Bible translation, and in whatever language they prefer. During the last three years we have heard numerous languages spoken: French, German, Portuguese, Shona and Tagalog are some from other countries, plus various languages from across Canada.

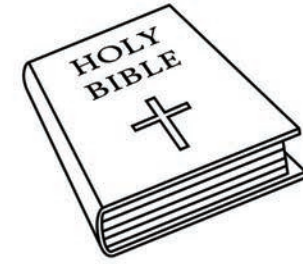
Everyone is invited to take part in the Bible Marathon. All one needs to do is sign up online for a time slot to read. A few weeks prior to the start of the event, a link will be posted to the diocesan website: athdio.ca. The times will be in Mountain Time so the reader will need to calculate accordingly for their community.

Not everyone likes to read aloud to others. However, the marathon is broadcast via a Facebook link to the Zoom platform where people are reading. This

enable you to listen as God's Word is proclaimed by people from various parts of the world and in a variety of languages.

We invited the Most Rev. Justin Welby, Archbishop of Canterbury, to take part from Canterbury in England. His Grace the Archbishop has kindly agreed to read at 9 am GMT (2 am MST) on Tuesday, March 26. Archbishop Linda Nicholls, our Primate, and all Bishops and Archbishops in the Anglican Church of Canada have also been invited to take part.

Please consider this your invitation to the Bible Reading Marathon. Individuals and families are encouraged to participate. If you would like to sing or chant a



Bible Reading Marathon
March 24, 1pm to March 28, 5pm

100 Hours of Sharing God's Word Via Zoom and Facebook

Sign Up at www.athdio.ca (after February 26)

passage, please do! The joy comes from reading the Word of God with people around the world.

Howell Welcomed by Northern Lights Parish

RICHARD LOKEN
St. Thomas', Perryvale

Some 30 members (30 per cent of the regular Sunday attendance) of the Parish of the Northern Lights met in the tiny St. Thomas' Anglican Church in Perryvale on Reformation Sunday, October 29, to witness the installation of the Rev. Rosemarie Howell as rector. That turnout is doubly impressive when you consider it is about 140 kms from one side of the multi-point parish to the other.

The Rev. Leon Cadsap, rector of All Saints', Fort McMurray set out at seven am to drive the 350 kms to Perryvale to preside over the installation.

We, the parishioners of Northern Lights, have become quite attached to Rose, and so this installation was only formalising a reality. Northern Lights parish consists of four congregations: Christ Church

Anglican in Wandering River, Saint Thomas' Anglican in Perryvale, and Saint Andrew's Anglican and Zion Lutheran in Colinton. Unfortunately, neither Bishop Larry Kochendorfer of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada Synod of Alberta and the Territories, nor Bishop David Greenwood of the Anglican Diocese of Athabasca, was able to attend.

Singing with 29 other people in a building of that size was a wonderful experience above and beyond the worship service and the installation service. It was also a pleasure to attend the potluck that followed in the Perryvale community hall.

The parishes of Athabasca, Lac La Biche, and the Northern Lights agreed in the summer of 2020 to share a common ministry team. The Rev. Rose Howell arrived in September 2020 to serve as associate priest with Bishop Larry Robertson leading that ministry team. In July 2022, Bishop Larry



Parish of the Northern Lights Rector Rose Howell, center; Leon Cadsap, rector of All Saints', Fort McMurray, left; Bill Creaser, deacon, Northern Lights parish.

retired, and the workload was redistributed. Howell became the priest in charge of the parishes of Athabasca and the Northern Lights. The sharing agreement came to

an end in July 2023 and the three parishes went their separate ways, with Howell starting a new role as rector of the Parish of the Northern Lights.



Pictured from left: Rose Howell, Bill Creaser, Northern Lights parish; Leon Cadsap, All Saints', Fort McMurray. Music team: Bruno Wiskel, Sheila Nielsen, Susan Galloway.



St. Mark's, High Prairie Participates in 800-year Tradition

The Rev. Deacon PETER CLARKE
Athabasca Diocese

Nearly 800 years after Francis of Assisi held the first live nativity in a village in Italy, members of an Anglican church in northern Alberta carry on the tradition.

Following a three-year hiatus, St. Mark's Anglican Church in High Prairie once again organised a Live Nativity on the church's front lawn. People came from all over town, as they had for the previous two decades on the first Friday night in December (8th), to watch costumed participants share the story of the birth of Jesus through scripture and song.

This has always been a special evening in many ways. First, we never know if anyone will turn up, either to watch or take part. People who simply come as spectators are coerced, like a very gentle form of the press gangs of old, into dressing as a shepherd, king, angel, or Mary. But they seem to thoroughly enjoy themselves.

The Greenwoods, Bishop David and Benita, joined in the fun. Bishop David opened the evening with prayer and spent plenty of time singing with the presenters who came from various denominations. Benita, a presenter, read passages of scripture during the evening.

We were blessed to have such a warm evening, by normal Alberta winter standards, with more than



Unseasonably warm weather contributed to the turn-out for St. Mark's Live Nativity, held in High Prairie in December. The annual event features costumed community members playing roles in the Christmas Story. Photos: The South Peace News

100 people in attendance. The cast of shepherds, young and older, the angels shining in their outfits, the Magi resplendent in their robes with their gifts for the baby Jesus, and of course Joseph, Mary and the baby Jesus brought a wonderful sense of the Nativity of our Lord to the people gathered. This well-lit scene unfolds a few feet from the main highway through town at night, and it is quite common to see cars slowing as they come upon it. Some drivers turn into the church car park for a better view.

This year, two donkeys and a miniature pony joined the cast of



characters in the stable. We still have not been able to find a real camel, however Bishop Greenwood came to the rescue with a camel costume which one of the kings wore with great enthusiasm. After the show, the cast and audience members, minus the barnyard animals, filed into the church hall for fellowship, food and refreshments. The costumes were removed and set aside for next year.

The evening was filled with joyful singing and participation. A perfect way to share the real meaning of Christmas with the whole community, no matter the

weather. I am sure that few people at our 2023 event realised it was also a celebration of another kind. Around the year 1220 in Italy, Francis of Assisi was asked to minister to a small village called Greccio. He lived in a cave for a while, where he set up a presepio (nativity or manger scene) for villagers to see. He decided to do something even more meaningful for the people so, on December 24, 1223, he held the first retelling of the Christmas story in the village, as people paraded in costumes accompanied by two donkeys.

St. Helen's, Fairview Welcomes Manning Priest for Advent Service

The Rev. Lloyd Nyarota led the Sunday service before Christmas at St. Helen's, Fairview on November 26. St. Helen's church moved into a storefront location at the Fairview Mall several years ago. The church space is located across from the Food Bank and serves the parish very well. There is plenty of opportunity to engage with people in the mall.

Nyarota serves the Manning church of St. John's United-Anglican. Once a month, due to the distance involved, he also brings services to the Grimshaw/Berwyn and Fairview parishes.



Shirley Lof, people's warden, and Edna Fix, Bishop's warden, present Lloyd Nyarota with a Christmas basket of goodies from parishioners.



Congregation, back row: Marie Neil, Jim McGregor, Irwin and Genevieve Konratt, Lloyd Nyarota, Shirley Lof, Tammy McKeachnie, Edna Fix, Inez Austin, Alice Schwartz. Kneeling: Donald Balisky, Doreen Verschoor, Ellen Lupick.

Candles and Carols Service at St. Bartholomew's, Grimshaw



Deacon Danielle McKenzie led the congregation in "Candles and Carols" at St. Bartholomew's, Grimshaw on December 22, 2023. Treats were offered following the service.

This is Our Missional



Gospel Work of ACW 'Transcends Parish Boundaries'

"The ACW (Anglican Church Women) transcends parish boundaries," said Bishop Stephen London greeting the All Saints' Anglican Cathedral congregation gathered during Advent for the ACW Mid-day Eucharist, held this year in December.

"You come together today, from Wainwright, Ponoka, Onoway, Spruce Grove, Stony Plain, Beaumont and Edmonton, as sisters in Christ for mission, fellowship and worship," said London who serves as Diocese of Edmonton ACW Chaplain. "You embody the truth that we are not just siloed, individual congregations. But we are a family of churches spread across central Alberta, all working together, of course, for the gospel of Jesus Christ."

"As a family in Christ, parishes do not need to compete, but we can celebrate the good work happening in each different place



Bishop Stephen London and Dean Alexandra Meek administer communion during the Diocesan ACW Mid-day Eucharist at All Saints' Anglican Cathedral. Photos: Margaret Glidden

because we see ourselves as working together for the whole of the common good," said London, adding that he has "spent much time thinking about a vision of the diocese as a whole."

"I love that you know one another so well, because you have

spent time together doing many things: praying for each other and the bigger church, helping each other and the bigger church, raising money for local initiatives, national and international initiatives...

"You are ACW members

from individual parishes, but you are also the ACW for the whole diocese, as well as being part of a much larger family, the ACW across Canada. I give thanks for the great ministry you do together for Jesus. May God bless you richly in the year ahead."

St. Augustine's Youth Show Spirit of Giving in Parkland

MICHELLE SQUANCE-SLADE
St. Augustine-Parkland, Spruce Grove

On a Friday night during Advent, youth members of St. Augustine-Parkland, who were recently confirmed by Bishop Stephen London, gathered at the Red Apple store in Stony Plain to collect donations for the

Kinsmen Christmas Hampers. Is there anything more heart-warming than kids helping kids? It was a slow shopping night in the store, but these guys did anything they could to bring in donations.

They all had such a good time together that we will be starting our first official youth group in 2024!



St. George's TLC members present Cassandra Garner, Executive Director of the Fort Saskatchewan Food Bank, with a donation from the Christmas Handcraft Sale.

St. George's TLC Supports Local Charities with Annual Handcraft Sale

The Ladies Club (TLC) of St. George's, Fort Saskatchewan offered an impressive selection of hand knit, sewn, quilted and crocheted items at their annual sale leading up to the Christmas season.

Members of the TLC meet in the church hall every Wednesday, from 9 am to 3:30 pm, to make items to sell in support of 16 local charities. Earlier this year, they donated 30 quilts to the Fort Saskatchewan Food Bank, and \$1,000 from a previous sale to the Furniture Bank, an organization helping refugees and people fleeing domestic violence, for the



purchase of bedding.

"We are happy to receive donated cotton fabric, wool, batting or sewing notions," says Sharon Taylor. "We also welcome new members to join us at anytime."

'Gracious and Merciful' - a Clergy Day Gospel Word

The Rev. Tim Chesterton, at the time rector of St. Margaret's, Edmonton, and currently serving as warden of lay evangelists in the Diocese of Edmonton, was invited by Bishop Steve and the Queerly Beloved working group to share a gospel word during the Clergy Day Eucharist, held on December 14, at St. Timothy's, Edmonton. The following is an abridged homily.

Over the years, when I have been meeting with small groups, I have sometimes asked them to sum up the essential Christian message in one or two sentences. The answers have been revealing. Almost always, they have focussed on our activity, usually in terms of being a good person and loving your neighbour.

Now, of course, there is nothing wrong with being a good person and loving your neighbour, but I'd simply like to point out that a call to love your neighbour is not good news -- it is good advice. And if, after generations of preaching, our dear Anglican people still think that the centre of the Christian message is good advice, well, we have a problem.

Jesus did not go into Galilee proclaiming good advice -- at least, not first. His first message was an announcement of good news: the time has come; the kingdom of God is at hand. The day you have been waiting for, the day when God will come and deliver us, that day has come! Based on that good news, Jesus told people what the appropriate response would be: repent and believe in the good news.

In the same way, the first apostles did not go out into Jerusalem and Judea and Samaria and the ends of the earth with a message of good advice. They announced good news: in Jesus, all God's promises to God's people had been fulfilled, because God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself. And the evidence of this was that God had raised him from the dead, of which they were witnesses. When people heard this message and believed it, they came to the apostles and said, "Brothers, what should we do?" At that point, the apostles talked about our human response: repentance, faith and baptism. The good advice followed on from that.

The most important lesson I have learned in my ministry is that it is vitally important to get these things in the right order. As the apostle John says, we love, because he first loved us. It is no use giving a message of good advice to people who do not believe God loves them. They will hear it as another checklist they have to complete to qualify for God's kingdom. They will not hear it as a word of grace: they will hear it as a list of requirements.

So: let us remind ourselves

of the gospel as preached to us by the writer of Psalm 145 (8-9, NRSV):

The LORD is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. The LORD is good to all, and his compassion is over all that he has made.

Verses like these give the lie to the common assumption many Christians make: that the God of the Old Testament is an angry judge, and the God of the New Testament is a God of forgiveness and love. Yes, many Christians believe that, despite the many times that tender imagery is used for God in the Hebrew scriptures, and also despite the fact that, to put it mildly, not everything that comes out of the mouth of Jesus is all sweetness and honey!

Here in these verses, we have phrases that are repeated several times in the Hebrew scriptures, to the point that they sound almost credal to us. What can you say about your God, Israel? We can say this: Yahweh is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. Yahweh is good to all, and his compassion is over all that he has made.

Grace: love that we don't have to earn or deserve, because it comes to us as a gift. Grace is God sending his sun and rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. Grace is Jesus saying to the woman caught in adultery, "Neither do I condemn you: go and sin no more." Grace is Jesus calling crooked Zacchaeus to come down from the tree, because Jesus was coming to his house that day. Grace is Jesus calling Paul, the chief of sinners, and making him an apostle of the faith he'd tried to stamp out.

And grace is God calling you and me, my friends. We all know that. Every one of us here is keenly aware of our own inadequacy. No matter how hard other people may be on us, the chances are, we are way harder on ourselves. One word of criticism in our ears will cancel out ten words of praise. Most of the time, most of us are haunted by the feeling that we're failing God in this impossible task that has been entrusted to us.

So maybe the real problem isn't that we so often forget to share a gospel word with our parishioners. Maybe the real problem is that so often we find it so hard to believe the gospel of grace ourselves. As Philip Yancey has put it so eloquently: grace means that there's nothing we can do to make God love us more, and nothing we can do to make God love us less. God already loves us infinitely, and nothing is ever going to change that fact. Do you believe that? Deep down in your heart? Do I believe it? That is the most fundamental question we can ask

ourselves.

God is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. I am not a Hebrew scholar, but I am going to be brave here and say that the NIV translation of the word *chesed* as 'love' is a bit weak! Yes, of course, it is love, but it is more than that! It is covenant love, love you can rely on, love that never gives up, love that is fundamentally stubborn! My favourite Old Testament scholar, John Goldingay, always translates *chesed* as 'commitment,' and I like that. It is not about how God feels about us; it is about God's covenant with us, which God will always be faithful to.

We, Christians, are a cantankerous bunch, in spite of Jesus' instruction to love one another. Even in the pages of the New Testament, we were not able

to agree on every detail of the faith we were trying to spread! And it didn't take many years after the removal of the threat of state persecuting each other -- not to mention non-Christians. We have always been a rag-tag community of saints and sinners, with all of us being saintly at times and sinful at other times. We are well aware of our own failures, and (Bishop) Steve has reminded us that now may be a time for humble listening for us, as well as joyful proclamation.

And yet, God is way too stubborn to give up on us. We know that, because we can see ourselves reflected in the imperfect people he chose and worked with in the Bible. Do I think I am better than them? Of course not. And yet, the Lord is gracious and merciful, abounding in steadfast love.

Giving Thanks for the Ministry of Cheryl Boulet and Tim Chesterton



At the Clergy Day in December, Bishop Stephen London and clergy of the Diocese of Edmonton say a prayer of thanksgiving for the ministry of Cheryl Boulet and Tim Chesterton who have retired as rector of St. John the Divine, Onoway, and rector of St. Margaret's, Edmonton, respectively. Photo: Margaret Glidden

CLERGY ADVERTISEMENTS

UNDERSTANDING THE HIDDEN SYMBOLISM

SIGNS LIKE THIS MEAN THAT THE ADVERTISEMENT IS MORE LIKELY TO BE GENUINE, RATHER THAN ONE SUBMITTED BY A PRANKSTER

WE HAVE BLOCKED OUT THESE DETAILS FOR OBVIOUS REASONS

"WE LOOKED AT ALL OF THE OTHER ADVERTISEMENTS AND COPIED WHAT THEY HAD WRITTEN"

"YOU CAN GO TO THE PUB IF YOU LIKE"

"NO-ONE ELSE WILL DO ANYTHING"

"YOU WILL HAVE TO DO EVERYTHING"

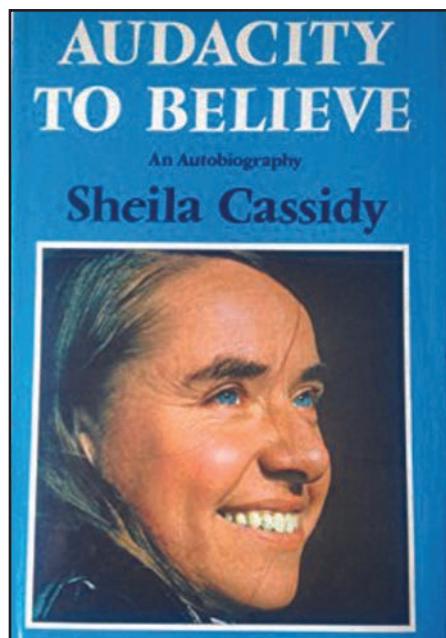
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- WE ARE LOOKING FOR A PERSON OF PRAYER WITH GOOD PREACHING AND PASTORAL SKILLS
- THERE ARE SUBSTANTIAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR MISSION NETWORKING
- THERE IS SCOPE FOR ENCOURAGING LAY PARTICIPATION
- WE NEED A VISIONARY LEADER WHO IS ENERGETIC, ENTHUSIASTIC AND PRACTICAL

Doctor's autobiography resonates still with readers



MARION BULMER
St. Thomas, Sherwood Park



I am stretching into my past when I bring you *Audacity to Believe* by Sheila Cassidy. Though this book can still be found, is not readily available.

I had been afraid to re-read it, wondering if it would have the same effect on me that it once had. I originally found this important book at a significant time in my faith journey, and it influenced my response or call to serve refugees. Though it is possible I might have found my way into refugee work without this book, that I may not have is also a possibility.

I got this book soon after its 1977 release. I picked it up at the beautiful Edmonton Public Library in Old Strathcona. Entering this lovely old building was like entering a holy place (at that time, I had

recently returned to church after being away for many years).

Cassidy was a doctor from the UK who chose to practice medicine in Allende's Chile. [Salvador Allende served as the 28th president of Chile from 1970 until his death in 1973.] Many people saw Allende's presidency as communist, while others viewed it as taking on issues of poverty and working to decrease the hold of an oligarchy on Chile and its wealth.

The author had arrived in Chile not knowing Spanish. She, like many professionals who move to a

new country, was unaware of the language barrier, let alone the need to requalify to practice medicine in a foreign country.

In Chile the rich were able to access public healthcare, hospitals and private doctors who had trained abroad. But Cassidy was shocked by the inadequate health care for those who were poor.

Cassidy had also not anticipated the effect moving to Chile would have on her spiritual journey, resulting in a renewal of her Catholic faith and practice. She received spiritual direction, and regularly attended mass. She began discerning a call to be a nun.

The church in Chile was criticised by many as being too close to the ruling classes. There was a movement within the church away from the wealthy to align with the poor throughout Chile.

Augusto Pinochet, a general in Chile, led a coup and Allende was deposed and died by suicide. At the time there was considerable debate as to whether he was murdered. During the coup people disappeared, were detained, tortured, or murdered.

Though Cassidy was not political, her book reveals that many of the clergy and nuns she was with were also activists. Sometime after the coup, she

was asked to treat a wounded resistance leader. Her oath as a doctor meant she would treat anyone. She was a doctor for all.

Later she was arrested at the home of a priest where she was treating a sick friend. The arresting officers came in shooting and killed a staff person in the home. Cassidy was taken into custody and tortured to give up the names of all who were involved in caring for Nelson Gutierrez.

Until it happened to her, Cassidy was in disbelief that Chile would torture a foreign national. (Electrical shock was used extensively in the torture of Sheila and many prisoners held in Chile.) She knew Britain would be in an uproar. Though she realised that foreign nationals were being deported and she eventually would be freed, Cassidy worried about the fate of imprisoned Chileans.

While in jail, Cassidy was able to worship using books people brought her. The women in jail practiced their faith together, overcame their fears and cared for each other.

Though I am at a different place in my life and in my faith journey, this book continues to have a profound affect on me.

Barrhead community to restore historic church continued

Continued from page 2.

St. Aidan's, located five miles from the town of Barrhead, was the most northerly church of the Paddle River Mission. The title to the land was issued to the Diocese of Edmonton in 1916. [According to the Rev. John Tyrrell, retired Anglican priest, St. Aidan's was "a thriving parish with regular services until 1966, thereafter a Harvest Thanksgiving service was held until 1975."]

The church building and adjoining cemetery were sold to the community of Glenreagh, in 1975, and became known as St Aidan's Community Church of Glenreagh and Bloomsbury Society. For the last 48 years, the property has been maintained by volunteers.

The church is used for weddings, get-togethers and recently the funeral service for 102-year-old Gladys Harris (author's mother).

While St. Aidan's was the first of the two churches to be set on fire in December 2023, most of the building remains standing as it has for the last 110 years. To date, this historic property has been maintained with donations from local families. At a meeting in late December, the community reached a unanimous decision to repair and restore the church.

With the restoration of St. Aidan's, three of the original seven churches of the Paddle River Mission remain. These include St. Peter's, Lac La Nonne, still



Members of the Paddle River Mission called St. Aidan's church at Glenreagh "Journey's End." Known today as St. Aidan's Community Church of Glenreagh and Bloomsbury Society, the property sustained primarily exterior damage that the local community hopes to repair.

part of the Anglican Diocese of Edmonton, as well as St. Aidan's and Belvedere Community Church. They are significant pieces of history and reminders of the commitment and faith of early settlers in the area. Author Rita Milne writes about the history of the Paddle River Mission churches in her book, *Here We Are*. For a copy of the book, contact the Synod Office by email: communications@edmonton.anglican.ca, or call 780-439-7344.

St. Aidan's Community Church sustained significant damage and efforts to fund its restoration are underway. It is our sincerest wish

that, through the grace of God, these buildings will remain for many more years to come.

To contribute to the restoration of St. Aidan's, please email Brenda

Harris-Baron at gebaron@telusplanet.net; or call (780) 459-4297.



In-hospital Spiritual Care

Should you require a hospital stay in Edmonton, you can receive a pastoral visit from the Anglican Hospital Chaplain. However, in addition to informing hospital staff that you are Anglican, you must also consent to being visited by a chaplain. When you give consent, you will be added to a list of patients who have requested a visit by the chaplain.

Please share this information with your family and friends. If you have any questions, do not hesitate to reach out by email to the Rev. Regula Brandle (Diocese of Edmonton Anglican Hospital Chaplain) at

revregula@edmonton.anglican.ca.