

Anglicans ring  
in new year

Laity honoured  
for long service



Sub-dean to  
retire in spring

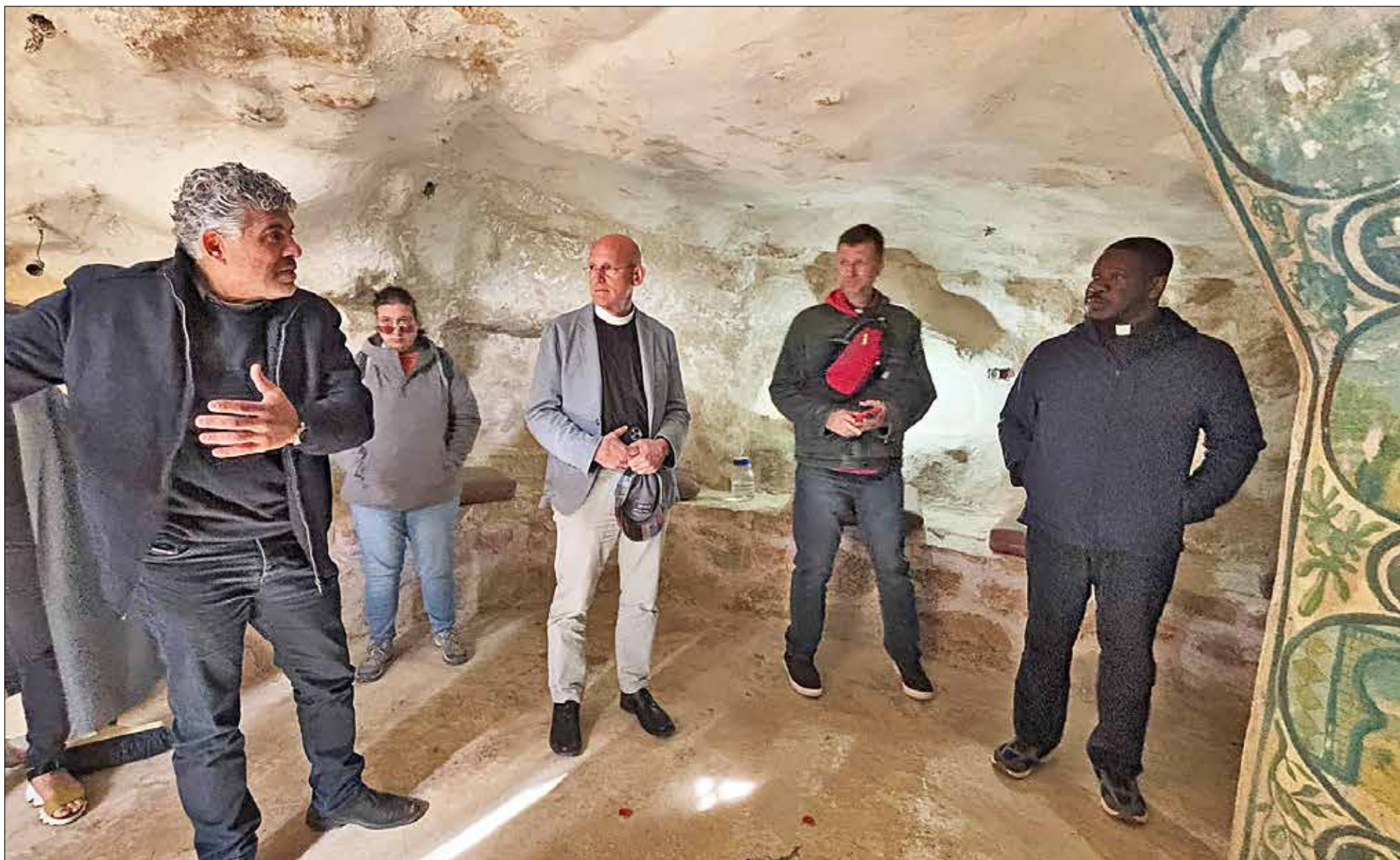
# The Anglican

THE NEWSPAPER OF THE DIOCESE OF TORONTO

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FEBRUARY 2026



Daoud Nassar (left) shows the Rev. Canon Dr. Christopher Brittain, the Rev. Dr. Jeff Nowers and the Rev. Dr. Alvarado Adderley of the Diocese of Toronto the cave in which his father lived out his life. Mr. Nassar and his family live on a hill-top farm near Bethlehem. PHOTO BY DR. SYLVIA KEESMAAT

## Pilgrimage begins with a checkpoint



*Bishop Asbil and a group of clergy and laity from the diocese travelled to the Holy Land in early December. Their reflections start here and continue on pages 11-14.*

BY BISHOP ANDREW ASBIL

My plane arrived at Ben Gurion airport in Tel Aviv in the wee hours of Nov. 26. Our flight was delayed by an hour. By the time I cleared customs and gathered my luggage, it was about four in the morning. A driver had been sent to fetch me. I was grateful to see him holding a piece of paper with my name scrawled on it. He had been waiting for some time. I felt badly for him and

for me, too. Sleep had eluded me on the airplane.

We departed the airport and headed toward Jerusalem, where we pilgrims would be staying at St. George's Pilgrim Guest House, located within the walls of the Cathedral Church of St. George the Martyr and the college bearing the same name. My driver and I talked nonstop along the way. I was interested in learning his story and to stay awake long enough to find comfort in a soft pillow and comfortable bed after a long journey. He lived with his family in the Christian quarter of the old city of Jerusalem. They had resided there for many generations. He talked about the hardships suffered by so many because of the Covid pandemic and then the war. Things were desperate for so many.

Only a few other cars shared the road

on that early morning drive. I peered out the window as we talked to try to catch a glimpse of the passing landscape but could see very little. It was still too dark. And then up ahead cars slowed down as we approached a checkpoint. All the other cars were waved on. Six or so army personnel stood in a circle at one of the kiosks. One soldier bearing a kerchief to conceal the lower half of his face motioned for us to stop. The driver lowered our windows. He leaned in to talk with the driver and then his attention focused on me.

Where are you from? he asked.

Canada, I replied.

Passport please, he said.

I gave him my passport. He eyed the document and then looked at me carefully.

I have one question for you, he said. And there is only one answer, yes or no. He paused. Do you understand? I nodded.

Do you have a Palestinian identification card?

No, I replied.

He handed the passport back and motioned us onward.

I was now fully awake.

That moment would be a foretaste of what we would see, hear, feel and experience on this pilgrimage with the Friends of Sabeel Liberation Theology Center in East Jerusalem. The Friends of Sabeel is an international and ecumenical response to the call of Palestinian Christians for solidarity. Through education and engagement, the organization supports the struggle for equality in justice, freedom

Continued on Page 11





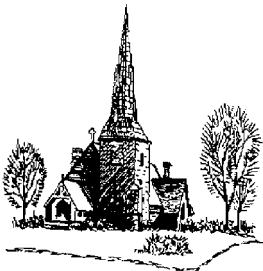
WALK & WORSHIP

St. Luke, Peterborough, St. John, Ida and the Parish of Craighurst and Midhurst hold walks and worship during the winter solstice in December. The outings included a relaxed hike, scripture readings and contemplation, and a celebration of the Eucharist. Clockwise from top left: the Rev. Andrew Kuhl, incumbent of the Parish of Craighurst and Midhurst, administers communion in the Simcoe County Forest; a boulder in Jackson Park serves as an altar for St. Luke's and St. John's service; members of St. Luke and St. John, including Abby the dog, gather before their walk. PHOTOS BY SHARON GRINDLAY AND COURTESY OF THE PARISH OF CRAIGHURST AND MIDHURST



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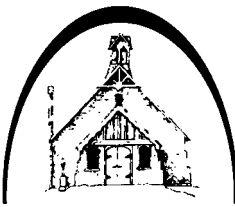
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BRIEFLY

Alongside Hope supports Jamaica

Alongside Hope has been working with Episcopal Relief and Development, its American counterpart, to provide essential supplies to

people in Jamaica dealing with the aftermath of Hurricane Melissa. It has created an immediate grant of \$10,000 toward an emergency response project organized by the Diocese of Jamaica and the Cayman Islands and is inviting donors to give directly to this appeal. Visit Alongside Hope's website, www.alongsidehope.org, to learn more about its response.

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Archdeacons Theodore Hunt and Cheryl Palmer receive greetings.



Archdeacon Steven Mackison and the receiving line.



NEW YEAR'S GREETINGS

Bishop Andrew and Mary Asbil along with Chancellor Marg Creal exchange New Year's greetings with friends at the annual Bishop's Levee, held at St. James Cathedral on Jan. 1. In addition to the receiving line and reception, the afternoon included a Eucharist, festive music and the ringing of the Bells of Old York. PHOTOS BY MICHAEL HUDSON



Bishop Riscylla Shaw and her husband Jana get a warm greeting.



Dean Stephen and Jacqui Hance talk with Heather McGregor, ODT.



Joining Bishop Kevin Robertson and his husband Mohan Sharma are the Rev. Carol Shih and the Rev. Matthew Waterman.



Bishop Asbil gives the benediction at the end of the worship service.



Enjoying food and refreshments.



# Beatitudes reveal our vision



The word “stewardship” often makes us think immediately about money, budgets and commitments. Those things matter, but if we begin there, we miss the heart of Christian stewardship. Stewardship is not first about what we give; it’s about who we are becoming. It’s about living a life shaped by the reign of God – a life aligned with the values Jesus sets before us at the very beginning of the Sermon on the Mount.

Matthew 5:1–12, the Beatitudes, is not a list of moral rules or religious achievements. It is Jesus’ portrait of a blessed life – a life that appears foolish by the standards of the world, yet radiant with God’s presence. Stewardship, rightly understood, is the practical outworking of this life. It shapes how disciples of Jesus manage their time, their resources, their relationships and their influence in light of God’s kingdom. The Beatitudes don’t say, “Blessed are the successful, the powerful or the financially secure.” They declare blessing upon the poor in spirit, the meek, the merciful and the peacemakers. Stewardship, then, flows not from abundance, but from trust. Not

## THE STEWARD

BY PETER MISIASZEK

from control, but from surrender.

Scripture consistently grounds stewardship in this truth: “The earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it” (Psalm 24:1). What we have is not self-made but God-given. This posture changes everything. If our resources are gifts entrusted to us, generosity is no longer a loss but participation in God’s ongoing giving. As Jesus teaches later in the Sermon on the Mount, “Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matthew 6:21). Our giving reveals what we value and what we hope for. When we hunger and thirst for righteousness, our resources naturally flow toward ministries that heal, restore and reconcile.

N.T. Wright describes the Beatitudes as “a summons to live in the present as people whose future has already arrived.” Stewardship is how we live now according to that future reality – investing in hope rather than fear. The early Church embodied this vision: “All who believed were together and had all things in common... distributing to all, as

any had need” (Acts 2:44–45). This was not coerced sharing, but Spirit-led generosity that made God’s peace visible.

That same Beatitude-shaped vision is embodied in the ministry of FaithWorks, which will celebrate its 30th anniversary in 2026. For nearly three decades, the meek, the merciful, those who hunger for righteousness and those committed to peace have given generously so that the most vulnerable are cared for. Through FaithWorks, the hungry have been fed, the vulnerable sheltered, the lonely visited and newcomers welcomed – an expression of the blessed life Jesus proclaims.

This year, as one Anglican family across the Diocese of Toronto, we are invited to build on that legacy by seeking not only to meet but to exceed our FaithWorks goal of \$1,500,000. I encourage you to pray, to reflect and to give as you are able, trusting that God will multiply what we offer. In living and giving this way, may we discover again Jesus’ promise: that those who walk this path are truly blessed.

*Peter Misiaszek is the diocese’s director of Stewardship Development.*

# We can aspire to everyday holiness



BY MURRAY MACADAM

The new year has begun, but 2026 is nonetheless young. There’s still time to make resolutions for the year ahead.

How about this one: resolving to become a more holy person?

That goal was likely not top of mind for you when thinking about resolutions. But perhaps it should be. We are always challenged by God to go deeper in our faith and our spirituality – to strive for holiness, the state or quality of being holy, sacred or sanctified.

Yet many of us don’t really believe that we’re capable of attaining holiness, of sanctity. On one level, that’s understandable. We’ve tended to put well-known holy people of faith onto a kind of pedestal, as “plaster saints” that the rest of us could not possibly match in our own lives. As well, the models of sanctity we’ve been given have tended to emphasize a world-denying asceticism, an other-worldly way of being, when we need examples of holy discipline and commitment in service to the world and in solidarity with those who are suffering. Holiness does not mean perfection or withdrawal from the world, but rather a wholeness lived in relationship and responsibility.

This does not have to involve heroic action, as we sometimes think, but the disciplined practice of noticing where God is already present in ordinary encounters. It can include focused listening and staying present

to suffering rather than turning away or allowing oneself to be interrupted.

Our Anglican tradition has included holiness movements that emphasized spiritual transformation and “Christian perfection” (freedom from sin) through a “second blessing” experience, stemming from John Wesley’s teachings, focusing on God’s nearness and on personal encounters with God. To live a holy life, one should cultivate a relationship with God through prayer, scripture and obedience to the core teachings of our faith. But perhaps we can expand our thinking about holiness for our lives. “Christian holiness in our age means more than ever the awareness of our common responsibility to cooperate with the mysterious designs of God for the human race.” Trappist monk Thomas Merton wrote those words more than 60 years ago in his slim but insightful book *Life and Holiness*. Yet they remain powerfully relevant today.

Note that he mentions “our common responsibility” when discussing holiness. This stretches the concept beyond an individual pursuit of holiness in terms of seeking perfection. Seen in that light, we can be inspired by holy people immersed in the worlds of literature, art, political struggle and everyday life who provide a witness of holiness in a world that many of us consider to be far from holy. They can serve as role models for lived holiness in a society increasingly fractured along political, social and economic lines.

Examples of such people that spring to mind for me include my friend David, a successful realtor who has turned his energy to providing affordable housing. Sustained by

a deep faith, he’s been involved with numerous non-profit housing ventures in recent decades. When a shelter in a nearby community was recently threatened with closure, he offered to financially support any landlord willing to offer a room to people turned away by the shelter.

Another person I’d consider holy is a woman named Sheila, who works tirelessly with marginalized people in my community of Peterborough to develop a community hub to help them meet basic needs, as well as the provision of tiny homes for the homeless despite opposition from the powers that be. She’s endured insulting behaviour at city council meetings while advocating for homeless individuals. Yet Sheila carries on at age 85. What keeps her going? I sense that she is illuminated by a source beyond herself, by a divine Light within herself that she expresses as a Quaker.

When I feel discouraged about the state of the world, I draw inspiration from David, Sheila and others who embody a holiness marked by steadfastness, courage and solidarity. From them I’ve learned that holiness is not about dramatic moments but about staying rooted in God’s love, justice and hope over the long arc of a life.

Life in Christ means growth and development towards wholeness – a word that is close to holiness. How can you strive towards holiness this year? What shape will that take in your daily life and routines?

*Murray MacAdam is a member of All Saints, Peterborough.*



## The Anglican

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### In the Diocese of Toronto:

A community of 254 congregations in 210 parishes covering 26,000 square kilometers. Of the nearly 5 million people who live within the diocesan boundaries, 376,000 claim to be affiliated with the Anglican Church, with about 80,000 people identified on the parish rolls. The diocese is home to many ethnic and language-based congregations, including African, Caribbean, Chinese, Filipino, French, Hispanic, Japanese, and Tamil. The City of Toronto has a large population of aboriginal peoples.

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# The caregiver pilgrimage

BY THE REV. CANON LUCY REID

A pilgrimage is both a holy journey and a powerful metaphor. Whether metaphorical or physical, it takes the pilgrim away from their normal context, and requires more of them as a result: more determination, more patience, more courage, more stamina. For many of us, becoming the primary caregiver for a loved one is the start of a new and often daunting journey. For people of faith, can it also become a holy pilgrimage? I have been pondering this question more deeply since my husband David was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease.

The Canadian Centre for Caregiving Excellence estimates that roughly one Canadian in four is acting as an unpaid caregiver for a family member, friend or neighbour. That's around 10 million of us at any one time. Some are full-time caregivers, while others juggle caregiving with paid employment. This is a crowded pilgrimage, though the people on the path are often invisible because caregivers tend not to stand out. And so the journey can be lonely as well as demanding. But can it be holy? Can it contain grace and blessing?

It's easier, of course, to see the rocks in the path rather than the blessings. In my experience, the rocks in the caregiver's journey look a lot like the first four stages of grief that psychiatrist Elisabeth Kübler-Ross listed: denial, anger, bargaining, depression.

In denial, or perhaps before the caregiver grasps the full scope of the challenges ahead, the thinking goes, "I can do this. It isn't so bad. Maybe the diagnosis is wrong. We've got lots of time." The opening stage of the pilgrimage feels manageable, and there is hope lighting the way.

Further along, as the reality sinks in and the demands on the caregiver become greater while energy is depleted, anger shows up on the path. Sometimes I feel irritation and frustration at David's memory lapses, and then I feel guilty for that. I don't live up to my own expectations of patience and kindness. Anger, fear and grief are entwined, as I miss the way things used to be for us and worry about the future.

Bargaining in this context can mean planning and hoping for a future that is now uncertain: just one more trip together, one more happy birthday, one more grandchild to be born. And there may be conversations with God in the sleepless hours of the night: "Just grant us this, and I'll be less short-tempered, more patient." Sometimes it's the raw cry of the Psalmist: "How long, O Lord?" I don't know if I can do this.

For the caregiver of someone with a progressive debilitating disease such as Alzheimer's, the depression that can settle in is a form of anticipatory grieving. The person is being lost inch by inch, bit by bit. David compares his disease to a thief in a library who is randomly stealing and throwing away book after book, and I see the ways in which he is being changed and sabotaged by this merciless thief. It is heartbreaking. The rocks of depression are grief, loneliness, loss, for both of us. The world shrinks and the path becomes darker.

Artist, writer and United Methodist minister Jan Richardson, in her prayer poem *A Blessing for the Brokenhearted*,

says, "Let us agree for now that we will not say the breaking makes us stronger. Let us promise we will not tell ourselves time will heal the wound, when every day our waking opens it anew." Easy answers or trite sayings don't help, because they don't touch the complex depth of the painful reality. Instead, she writes, "Perhaps it can be enough to simply marvel at the mystery of how a heart so broken can go on beating... [with] the rhythm of a blessing we cannot begin to fathom but will save us nonetheless." (This prayer can be found in her book *The Cure for Sorrow*.)

Caregivers have hearts that are breaking because of their loved one's suffering, and yet they go on. Resilience and faithfulness are the pulse within those hearts, and caregiving can become a form of spiritual discipline, with a daily vow to continue it with love and devotion.

David and I have had a morning prayer and meditation practice for almost 50 years, and many mornings these days I sit with that vow to care on my heart. Some days it feels light and natural, while others it feels impossibly heavy. And I'm reminded of the pilgrimage that David and I made in 2019, when we walked from Lindisfarne across Scotland to Iona. Some mornings we anticipated the day's walk ahead with pleasure, but on other mornings we were daunted by the distance, hurting with blisters and sore knees, and taciturn with each other as we set out wrapped in our separate cloaks of gloom. What saved us, kept us going and blessed us were the gifts along the way of other people's care, the beauty of the earth, and surprise moments of grace.

I draw on those same gifts now, on this pilgrimage of caregiving. Other people's love and understanding are immeasurably helpful. While walking to Iona, it was the practical gifts of plasters for blisters, a warm blanket to go over my sleeping bag, advice about walking poles and knee wraps. Now it's a friend who meets me regularly for coffee so that I can vent, laugh and sometimes weep. Or it's the little group of caregivers who meet monthly to share our stories, pool resources, and know that we are utterly understood by each other. Or it's my son's offer to move in for a few days so that I can visit my sisters on the other side of the country.

Richard Gillard's "Servant Song" hymn expresses it well:

*We are pilgrims on a journey,  
Fellow travellers on the road.  
We are here to help each other  
Walk the mile and bear the load.*

The gift of other people makes it possible to continue the pilgrimage. Earth's blessing is another constant, and one on which I rely more and more. Walking across Scotland, we were startled repeatedly by the sheer beauty around us, no matter how sore or grumpy we had been: bluebells and gorse, cows and lambs, mountains and valleys, and finally the astonishing turquoise of the sea around Iona. The earth is unconditionally generous in her gifts, if we have eyes to see. And now, at home, as I walk our elderly dog down to the river or over to a park, it's a time to breathe more deeply and see more clearly. Even in the cold or wet, the earth restores me and blesses me.

Then there are the surprise moments of grace. After one especially gruelling day's hike on the Scottish pilgrimage, we arrived at a hostel and found it offered



Walking across Scotland in 2019. 'What saved us, kept us going and blessed us were the gifts along the way of other people's care, the beauty of the earth, and surprise moments of grace,' writes the author. 'I draw on those same gifts now, on this pilgrimage of caregiving.' PHOTO BY THE REV. CANON LUCY REID

home-cooked meals and a hot tub. What joy! That small luxury went a long way. And grace has continued to surprise me on the caregiving pilgrimage: chance upon a poem or a quote that lifts my spirits; getting a phone call from a friend checking in; being given a time and place to retreat for a day. I'm practising noting those moments of grace, and saying yes to opportunities for self-care, not least because the sobering fact is that caregivers have an increased risk of illness and even death because of the physical, emotional, social and spiritual load they carry.

In her book *Ordinary Mysticism: Your Life as Sacred Ground*, author and teacher Mirabai Starr encourages us to be exactly who we are, "a true human person doing their best to show up for this fleeting life with a measure of grace, with kindness and a sense of humour, with curiosity and a willingness to not have all the answers, with reverence for life." And she too uses the walking metaphor: "Keep walking. Rest up and walk again. Fall down, get up, walk on. Pay attention to the landscape... Be alert to surprises... and

keep your heart open against all odds. Say yes to what is, even when it is uncomfortable or embarrassing or heartbreaking. Hurl your handful of yes into the treetops and then lift your face as the rain of yes drops its grace all over you, all around you, and settles deep inside you."

The fifth stage of grief that Elisabeth Kübler-Ross identified is acceptance. For a dying person, it heralds the ability to let go, say goodbyes, and have some measure of peace about the impending death. For the caregiver, perhaps acceptance is about being able to say yes to what is happening to their loved one – not that it's good, but that it simply is; and in the yes, gradually to find the grace that "settles deep inside."

I'm not there yet. But I trust that this journey, like all our journeys, is held tenderly in the heart of God where the pulse of love abides and nothing is lost. And I trust that as we near our destination, we are always going home.

*The Rev. Canon Lucy Reid is a retired priest of the diocese.*



# Finding hope in the deep dark of winter



BY MELODIE NG

With cold nights that fall fast and weeks of little sun, winter challenges us with her relentlessness. By February, many of us sigh a breath of relief as the days slowly begin to lighten again. What does a farmer do in the deep dark of winter? For this urban farmer, I spent one winter afternoon shelling beans with Kristen, one of our dedicated volunteers. We spent a cozy afternoon sipping hot drinks, catching up and breaking up dried pods. It's a pleasant activity working with your hands while reflecting on the end of the busy farm season. The autumn of 2025 wrapped up with a flurry of workshops on nutrition, bee houses, seed-saving and cold stratification. Our lively Harvest Open House during Urban Agriculture Week featured music, scavenger hunts and a food forest workshop led by Dr. Sylvia Keesmaat. At Common Table Farm, we're proud to be a place where city folks encounter soil and plants, deepening their connections to the ecosystems that sustain us.

When I first began farming, I didn't know much at all. I was eager to learn everything, from starting seedlings to saving seed. Shelling dry beans is one of the last steps of seed-saving. The first step involves growing the crop and allowing the plant to complete its whole life cycle. In the case of beans, that means allowing the legume to grow to maturity, flower and set its seed. Sometimes we design-



Shelling dry beans and saving the seeds. An enjoyable way to spend a February afternoon. PHOTO BY MELODIE NG

nate a few plants for this purpose. Other times we simply collect the overly mature pods that were missed during harvesting and have become too fibrous for eating as fresh beans. We let the pods dry on the plant, then pick them and dry them further inside. A dehumidifier and a dry space are helpful at this stage – otherwise you may contend with mold issues.

Saving our own seed is a practical choice – it saves us some money from having to purchase seeds annually. It also

means that the plants we grow from our own seed are becoming locally adapted to the conditions that we encounter on our farm. It's a unique opportunity to engage youth with the life skills involved in this ancient farming practice. Because the school year doesn't line up with the growing season, the farm is put to bed for a good number of months when students are in class. But we can still host students and show them the kinds of plants that we save seed from. Aside from beans, we collect from okra, bitter melon, lettuce, tomato, eggplant, pepper and various flowers. Youth are introduced to the incredible diversity of seeds from different crops and varieties, and learn how to collect and store them.

Seed-saving also connects our farm to the wider world of food sovereignty. The ability of growers and communities to maintain traditional foods and sustain their own food production is a key aspect of food sovereignty. Seeds are sacred in many cultures. For Indigenous and Black communities, seeds have been at the heart of histories of resistance to colonization and enslavement. Seeds continue to be at the forefront of food sovereignty battles, as small-scale farmers fight injustices imposed by multinational corporations. In a sea of bad news, it's an intentional choice to celebrate good news when it comes. This past November, 15 Kenyan smallholder farmers won a legal battle challenging the government's Seed and Plant Varieties Act. The law had criminalized the saving and exchanging of unregistered seeds, penalizing small-

scale farmers while providing proprietary rights to commercial plant breeders. Let's all cheer for these persevering farmers! They stood up for their rights to share indigenous seeds, preserving a practice that farmers have engaged in for countless generations. These farmers spoke the truth that the value of seeds runs much deeper than money.

A final step to saving bean seed: pop those shelled beans into the freezer. I've learned from experience that if you just store the beans after shelling, the notorious bean weevil may hatch and strike, eating up your saved beans and causing quite a bit of sadness! Freezing seems to kill off any potential eggs. After about a week in the freezer, remove the beans to dry fully again. Then store them in a paper envelope in a cool, dry place or airtight container until planting time.

Speaking of planting time: it will be quite busy again, soon enough. I'll appreciate a few more weeks at a slower pace – cracking open the brittle pods, feeling the smooth roundness of the beans as they fall out (or sometimes fly out!), discarding the detritus of last year to be composted, and holding the promise of the coming season in my palms. On cold February afternoons, this is where I find hope in the deep dark beauty of winter.

Melodie Ng is the manager of Common Table Farm, a ministry of Flemingdon Park Ministry in Toronto. To find out more about the urban farm or to support its work, contact Ms. Ng at [cmelodie@flemingdonparkministry.com](mailto:cmelodie@flemingdonparkministry.com).

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Canon Sr. Elizabeth Rolfe-Thomas, SSJD, at  
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## The Sisterhood of St. John the Divine



# Season plants seeds of spiritual renewal

## Prayer, worship lead way

BY STUART MANN

**EARLY** in the Season of Spiritual Renewal, the Rev. Canon Dr. Judy Paulsen compiled a collection of prayers called *Prayers Through the Ages*. The resource was created to help Anglicans in the diocese pray for spiritual renewal.

“We thought we would put it online and we might get 100, maybe 200 people downloading it,” she said.

A few churches couldn’t print the resource and asked Canon Paulsen if she could send some printed copies. “So we printed some, and they all went,” she recalls. “And then people were calling us saying they wanted something in a smaller format that they could put in their bible, so we printed 2,000 copies and they all went, too.”

The resource, which featured short, simple prayers written by Christians of different denominations over the centuries, became a sought-after item not only in churches but wherever Anglicans gathered, including the annual clergy conference, Synod and the season’s five big Lift Up Our Hearts services.

“People were not only taking one for themselves but two or three for family, friends and relatives,” says Canon Paulsen, who recently retired as the season’s coordinator. “That’s a really weird thing for Anglicans to do!”

The Season of Spiritual Renewal was held in the diocese from 2023 to Epiphany of this year. It was the first of 20 “calls” that emerged from the diocese’s visioning process, Cast the Net. Its purpose was to help Anglicans rekindle their faith after the Covid pandemic.

Looking back over the last two years, Canon Paulsen says the season provided plenty of surprises and insights. One was that Anglicans in the diocese are hungry for resources and teaching on prayer. Of the 40 workshops

offered during the season, the top two best-attended, single-session workshops were about prayer and Christian meditation. A total of 314 people registered for workshops on prayer, averaging nearly 40 people per session.

Another learning was that Anglicans love to gather to worship God, even on a Saturday afternoon. Just over 1,600 people attended the five Lift Up Our Hearts services, which were held in different parts of the diocese. The services included preaching, music, lay anointing and lay witness talks. The offerings amounted to \$7,045, which was given to support the ministry of the Council of the North.

Anglicans are also hungry to learn more about scripture, the creeds, church history and Christian disciplines. How to use resources for discipleship and how to develop small group and bible study ministries were among the most popular topics of discussion. The nine-session Christian Foundations course had the fourth-highest registration of all the workshops, and a course studying the Rule of St. Benedict had the sixth-highest registration.

The season found that while Anglicans tend to be shy about sharing their faith, they understand the importance of it and are eager to learn how to do it in winsome and respectful ways. Clergy are also keen to learn how to preach in a way that helps people take steps to become followers of Jesus Christ. The two-part workshop on Preaching Evangelistically was well attended, as was the Everyday Witness course and the workshop on A New and Ancient Evangelism.

One of the key learnings from the season is that spiritual renewal can happen using what is at hand, says Canon Paulsen. “We’ve seen that when we bring to God the best of what we have, to whatever capacity we can, God blesses it. We never expected that many people to



Anglicans worship at the Lift Up Our Hearts service at Trinity, Streetsville, one of five such services held throughout the diocese during the Season of Spiritual Renewal. At right, the popular *Prayers Through the Ages*. PHOTO BY MICHAEL HUDSON

show up for worship on a Saturday afternoon, and we didn’t know that we were going to run 40 workshops. Those ideas just kept showing up for us, based on people’s suggestions. We simply created space for lots of the gifts of the diocese to be highlighted. We didn’t look outside the diocese for experts to come in; we saw that we had a lot of great skills and experience right here.”

Another important learning was that worship can drive spiritual renewal. “Having the right resources is very helpful, but worship is the thing that feeds the soul,” she says. “Things happen in worship that we can’t explain. We never imagined people lining up for the ministry of prayer and anointing with oil at all five services, two of which were held in churches that had never offered them before. As people became more aware that God hadn’t left the building, they could pray for others in their lives who had spiritual longings, and could trust that God was already there, sewing the seeds and cultivating the ground.”

Some of those seeds are already starting to grow, she says. More churches are incorporating lay witness talks into their worship services. The talks, which featured

lay people giving testimony about their spiritual lives, were one of the most inspiring parts of the five Lift Up Our Hearts services. More churches are also exploring the ministry of prayer and anointing with oil.

On an everyday level, Anglicans in the diocese seem to have drawn a little bit closer to God, she says. “We’re talking about God a little more freely, with the expectation that God is at work, in churches large and small.”

To keep the momentum going, Canon Paulsen and the season’s steering committee suggest some initiatives for the years ahead, including:

- every parish should be encouraged to continue to pray for renewal, and to include such prayers in all their parish meetings and worship services;
- at least one diocesan worship service be offered annually, with possible on-site workshops offered after the service;
- a discipleship conference to encourage discipleship in all churches across the diocese, and for the diocese to develop discipleship resources specific to the diocese’s context;



**Prayers Through the Ages**  
Daily prayers for spiritual renewal

- book studies on how to share the faith;
- a Season of Spiritual Enrichment that focuses on leadership development.

Canon Paulsen’s biggest hope is that Anglicans in the diocese continue to talk about God more. “For me, that’s the thing I most hope for going forward – that we won’t lose our freedom to talk about the way God is at work in our lives. Because I think that’s going to be the most attractive thing with people who have spiritual longings. If it’s just about signing up for committee work, that’s not going to do it, because they can do that through the Rotary Club. It’s got to be a focus on God first, and our love and worship of God, and out of that will flow all these other good things – love of neighbour through word and deed.”

## Diocese appoints new Communications director

**MARTHA** Holmen has been appointed the diocese’s next director of Communications, beginning her new role on April 13.

Ms. Holmen has served in the communications department since 2014, overseeing the diocese’s social media channels and website. In addition to advising parishes on digital communications, she has supported diocesan initiatives such as Cast the Net and the Season of

Spiritual Renewal, led a major website renewal project, written many news stories for *The Anglican* and produced the bishop’s Christmas and Easter video messages.

“I’m so delighted to be stepping into this role. I’m eager to keep sharing the good news happening in every corner of our diocese, and I’m grateful for the chance to help strengthen the connections that bring our shared story to life,” says

Ms. Holmen.

A lifelong Anglican, she has lived in the diocese since 2009 and has been a part of several parish communities, including St. Philip, Etobicoke, St. Martin in the Fields, St. James Cathedral and St. Nicholas, Birch Cliff.

“Martha’s deep institutional knowledge, creative vision and steadfast commitment to telling the diocese’s story in ways that

build communities of hope and compassion made her the unanimous and joyful choice,” says Varun Balendra, the diocese’s executive director. “Martha will bring renewed energy to our Cast the Net priorities, particularly in digital mission, reconciliation storytelling and parish vitality, while building faithfully on the strong foundation laid by Canon Stuart Mann, who is retiring on June 1.”



Martha Holmen



# Laity receive Order of the

The Order of the Diocese of Toronto, an award created in 2013, honours members of the laity in the diocese who have given outstanding service over a significant period of time in their volunteer ministry. We give thanks to God for the work and witness of these faithful people who, in the exercise of their baptismal ministry, have demonstrated that "their light shines, their works glorify." In 2025, the recipients came from the following deaneries: Etobicoke-Humber, Huronia, Oshawa, Scarborough and Toronto East.

## Paul Aitcheson, ODT

St. Andrew, Scarborough

Mr. Aitcheson was nominated by St. Andrew, Scarborough for his unwavering commitment and dedication to essential parish work. He has volunteered in the counting ministry for nearly five decades and has been envelope secretary for the last 25 years, while also acting as treasurer for fundraising events. A willing trainer of others, the calm and kind devotion he applies to his work continues to inspire those who serve alongside him.

## Kathleen Barnes, ODT

St. Paul, L'Amoreaux

Mrs. Barnes was nominated by St. Paul, L'Amoreaux for her dedicated service since 1973. In addition to teaching, hospitality and community service, in 2009 she assumed co-leadership for the parish outreach program, which supports diocesan and parish projects around the world. During her time, over \$500,000 has been raised. In a rapidly changing community, she has played a significant role in welcoming the new people who have gathered at St. Paul's.

## Jennifer Bellis, ODT

St. Paul, L'Amoreaux

Mrs. Bellis was nominated by the bishop for dedicated service since 1974 in community ministry with finances, women's fellowship and community service. As co-leader of the parish outreach program alongside Kathleen Barnes, ODT, she has served as a dedicated volunteer with Agincourt Community Services and as the parish FaithWorks representative for the diocese. She has stewarded her professional skills in IT and math in day-to-day parish finances and in fundraising for parish outreach and diocesan ministries.

## Christine Blair, ODT

St. James, Orillia - Huronia Regionalization

Mrs. Blair was nominated by St. James, Orillia for her service to the diocese as warden and lay delegate to Synod, and her all-important ministry to children. For nearly 50 years, she has organized St. Nicholas Day, where children buy presents for family members and volunteers wrap gifts and bring holiday cheer. In her parish community, she is the inspired ministry leader for fellowship.

## Jacqueline Bramma, ODT

All Saints, Whitby

Mrs. Bramma was nominated by All Saints, Whitby for her leadership and dedication to Christian education and spiritual formation. She has been a member of All Saints for 42 years and has held a variety of roles, including reader, intercessor, biblical storyteller, anointer, bell ringer and cantor, and an Alpha,



New members of the Order of the Diocese of Toronto stand with Bishop Andrew Asbil, suffragan bishops and clergy after their investiture at St. James Cathedral on Jan. 18, 2026.

small group and book club leader. Her ministry has touched many and inspired faith in others.

## Ian Campbell, ODT

Christ Church, Scarborough

Mr. Campbell was nominated by Christ Church, Scarborough in recognition of his lifetime service to the parish. His great uncle donated the land on which the current church building was built, tying his family legacy to the parish, which will celebrate its 180th anniversary in June. Since his early youth, he has held every possible position, including warden, treasurer, Sunday School teacher, screening coordinator, trustee of the cemetery board and choir member – an extraordinary witness to Church service.

## Brian Chandler, ODT

Nativity, Malvern

Mr. Chandler was nominated by Nativity, Malvern for decades of exceptional, selfless service and leadership in the church's life and mission. His contributions include managing major capital projects, securing multiple government grants, and coordinating numerous parish initiatives that enhanced both ministry and community, as well as the working relationship between the parish and diocese. Through tireless ingenuity, teamwork and faith, he demonstrates outstanding Christian stewardship and has created an enduring legacy of service.

## Debbie Christie Morgan, ODT

Atonement, Alderwood

Mrs. Morgan was nominated by Atonement, Alderwood for her many years of steadfast, quiet but essential ministry that reflects devotion, reliability and deep love. As deputy warden, she has provided faithful leadership, produced the weekly bulletin with care, and tirelessly supports the church office. Always ready to help and encourage others, she is a true blessing to her community, embodying the very heart of Christian ministry.

## Ann Copeland, ODT

St. Paul, Innisfill

Ms. Copeland was nominated by the bishop for volunteering long before there was a Diocesan Volunteer Corps, serving as a Logos instructor and advisory board trainer. An expert in rural ministry and family-sized parishes, she has co-coached nine different parishes through several Natural Church Development cycles. Always up for a challenge, this retired registered nurse brings a calm presence to anxious situations, serving as a parish selection coach in south Simcoe County congregations.

## Charles Cutts, ODT

St. Nicholas, Birch Cliff

Mr. Cutts was nominated by the bishop for his advice in complex financial endeavours, including the amalgamation of St. David, Donlands and St. Andrew,

Japanese and acting as Canon 24 administrator. He joined the St. Anne, Toronto post-fire discernment group in June 2024, and now works with the diocesan Property Resources department and the St. Paul, L'Amoreaux board. An avid golfer and Blue Jays fan, he delights in his grandkids and is known to be the steady, calm hand at the wheel.

## Samson Davis, ODT

St. Bede

Mr. Davis was nominated by St. Bede for 25 years' service and music ministry as choir director. His mentorship has empowered many young musicians to lead in churches, while his organized concerts have earned acclaim across the diocese. Beyond music, he has served as warden, treasurer and committee member, which highlights his dedication to the church's ongoing discipleship and development.

## Sadie Essue-Heaven, ODT

St. Timothy, Agincourt

Ms. Essue-Heaven was nominated by St. Timothy, Agincourt for demonstrating true discipleship every day, using all the given gifts of the Holy Spirit. A determined parish property manager, she has actively embraced every role she has been invited to. She walks into the church with an attitude of joy and hope, spreading God's love to all those she works with, extending warmth and welcome to all with her gracious and generous spirit.



# The Diocese of Toronto



n. 1. PHOTO BY MICHAEL HUDSON

**Catherine Figueira, ODT**  
*All Saints, Kingsway*

Mrs. Figueira was nominated by All Saints, Kingsway for her outstanding volunteer ministry within the parish as an example of someone who truly lives their faith. She has served as warden, chancel guild coordinator, choir member and Out of the Cold volunteer. Widely respected within the parish, she has been instrumental in coordinating fundraising and programming initiatives that have raised All Saints' profile and enabled the parish to serve the local and wider community.

**Olive Joy Freemantle, ODT**  
*St. Paul, Uxbridge*

Mrs. Freemantle was nominated by St. Paul, Uxbridge for a quarter century of faithful service to her parish. As a past warden, she is currently a member of the altar guild, chair of the Outreach Committee, coordinator of the prayer chain, organizer of the Christmas hamper program, reader, intercessor and lay administrator. Her faith is exemplified in devoted engagement.

**John Hipwell, ODT**  
*St. George, Fairvalley - Huronia Regionalization*

Mr. Hipwell was nominated by St. George, Fairvalley for his tireless work for the parish in a variety of capacities. A warden, parish executive member, cemetery board member and maintenance man,

his suggested most important role is as a sidesperson, where he exudes a smiling welcome at the church door. With a level-headed approach to any parish discussion and decision, he is a constant comfort in any situation.

**Wenda Hunter, ODT**  
*St. Luke, Price's Corners - Huronia Regionalization*

Mrs. Hunter was nominated by St. Luke, Price's Corners for decades of quiet dedication to her various roles in the church. As altar guild chair, ACW member and a leader in hospitality, she has faithfully provided support and fed many, always completing tasks as promised and helping those in need. Gracious and selfless with a warm smile, she has dedicated untold hours both behind the scenes and up front as a model of true Christian love.

**Margaret Jocz, ODT**  
*St. Paul on-the-Hill, Pickering*

Mrs. Jocz was nominated by St. Paul on-the-Hill for her leadership as director of the St. Paul's Community Food Bank. During her tenure, the food bank grew with the demand of need, and today it provides food to more than 35,000 people. In 45 years at St. Paul's, she has served on committees and contributed to the Ladies' Fellowship, scholarship fund committee, and kitchen and event ministry, devoting a lifetime of service to her parish and community.

**Teresa Johnson, ODT**  
*St. Barnabas, Chester*

Ms. Johnson was nominated by St. Barnabas, Chester for 50 years of volunteer ministry as warden, Sunday School coordinator, chancel guild coordinator, choir member, lay reader, communion minister, advisory board member, day care board member and more. She exercised her baptismal ministry throughout her professional career in early childhood education at the Scott Mission Childcare Centre. God's light shines throughout her faithful service, and her parish is grateful for her continuing work and witness.

**Catherine King, ODT**  
*St. David Anglican-Lutheran Church, Orillia - Huronia Regionalization*

Ms. King was nominated by St. David Anglican-Lutheran Church, Orillia for demonstrating exemplary service to her community and parish. With her guidance and sharing of gifts, St. David's has been blessed with diverse, inclusive and reconciling worship for many decades, as well as navigating new relationships of parishes working together through regionalization. A vibrant member of the congregation, the people of St. David's say, "who we are and who we will become will always include touches of Catherine King."

**Mary Larson, ODT**  
*St. Margaret in-the-Pines*

Mrs. Larson was nominated by St.

Margaret in-the-Pines for her stewardship as parish treasurer for more than 10 years, bazaar organizer and a dedicated chorister. Her work spanning over three decades has been an inspiration to her parish. Her parish is blessed to have her care of financial records, as well as her contributions to many parish ministries.

**Gordon Launchbury, ODT**  
*St. Athanasius, Orillia - Huronia Regionalization*

Mr. Launchbury was nominated by St. Athanasius, Orillia for long-standing faithful membership since 1975. Assuming many leadership roles over the past 50 years, he has mentored many youth and adults alike with his biblical and Anglican knowledge and experience. Devout in his faith in Jesus Christ and an exemplary example of servant leadership, his faith is personified in his words and actions.

**Michelle Loftus, ODT**  
*St. Martin, Bay Ridges (Pickering)*

Mrs. Loftus was nominated by St. Martin, Bay Ridges (Pickering) for offering steadfast support and leadership across a wide variety of ministries since 1983. Her journey with the church, enhanced by her professional background as an emergency services head nurse, has been marked by a deep commitment to service and abiding faith. Always welcoming everyone with open arms and an open



Continued from Page 9

heart, she shows God's love and embodies the spirit and mission of our patron saint, St. Martin.

**Lisa Luciani-Turner, ODT**  
*Holy Wisdom*

Mrs. Luciani-Turner was nominated by Holy Wisdom for commitment to the parish, community and diocese for decades through administration, care for vulnerable people in the neighbourhood, and the diocesan Social Justice and Advocacy Committee. Originally a St. Peter's member, she has served on all committees formed in the amalgamation process. Loved by the parish, and a gift to many rectors over the years, she has been instrumental in the amalgamation that birthed Holy Wisdom.

**Joyce MacKeen, ODT**  
*St. Paul, Washago – Huronia Regionalization*

Mrs. MacKeen was nominated by St. Paul, Washago for more than 50 years' service in ministry across the diocese. As an Associate of the Sisterhood of St. John the Divine, lay reader, preacher, pastoral visitor, Eucharist assistant and member of several parishes, she has shared her love of Christ with many in the church and community. At 96 years young, she is a positive force and influence in her parish community.

**Dawn Mercer, ODT**  
*St. Matthew, Islington*

Mrs. Mercer was nominated by St. Matthew, Islington for her exemplary commitment to discipleship. With devotion and skill, she has uplifted the children through curriculum creation, design and teaching for the weekly Club Matt (Sunday School) and monthly Messy Church programs. She has helped grow adult disciples of Christ through weekly bible study and special Advent and Lenten study groups. With God's help, her vision and faithfulness for discipleship ministry has become fruitful.

**Marlene Paulsen, ODT**  
*St. Dunstan of Canterbury*

Mrs. Paulsen was nominated by St. Dunstan of Canterbury for four decades of ministry marked by a deeply pastoral heart. Through faithful leadership in worship, careful stewardship of liturgy, and commitment to prayer, study and spiritual care, she has shaped the devotional life of the parish. With quiet strength and generous service, she has nurtured a community of faith tended with reverence, joy and gracious hospitality.

**Gail Payne, ODT**  
*St. Paul, Lindsay*

Dr. Payne was nominated by the bishop for Christian love in service and faith in action, rooted in awe of creation and belief in the assurance of Jesus' love for us. Her gifts are offered in her parish as an anointer, lay reader, pastoral visitor, Eucharistic minister, chair of the Outreach Committee, refugee sponsor and environmental and Indigenous relations champion. For the diocese, her efforts resulted in A Place Called Home becoming a FaithWorks ministry.

**Jillian Reeves, ODT**  
*Holy Wisdom*

Mrs. Reeves was nominated by the bishop for remarkable stewardship of time and treasure in raising up children in Sunday School ministry and fostering over 100 children. Serving as godparent to many within the parish and community, she has had a profound impact on toddler, children and youth ministry for decades. She is passionate about presence in the lives of children and young people, measured directly through her dedication



to developing a safe and positive ministry and home.

**Mary Ridgley, ODT**  
*Trinity Church, Aurora*

Ms. Ridgley was nominated by the bishop for lifetime involvement in the Toronto Diocesan Choir School – first as a chorister, then staff member, program director and director. Since 1974, the Choir School has united young people across the diocese and developed in them an appreciation and aptitude for Church choral tradition. Her commitment to choral music and youth includes her ministry as music director of Trinity Church, Aurora, where she has directed the youth choir for 32 years.

**Michael Royce, ODT**  
*Grace Church on-the-Hill*

Mr. Royce was nominated by the bishop for extraordinary dedication and generosity to institutions such as Trinity College and his home parish. He has served on boards and committees at Trinity, including the recent building development of the Lawson Centre for Sustainability, and in his parish as warden, committee member, prayer leader organizer and sidesperson to encourage development of lay leadership. Considered an invaluable leader in his parish and beyond, he has worked to advance the mission of our Church.

**Florence Schwerdtner, ODT**  
*Holy Trinity, Guildwood*

Mrs. Schwerdtner was nominated by Holy Trinity, Guildwood for loving and caring ministry and service to Christ and his Church. Having served twice as a warden, her competent, caring hands and loving heart continue to find expression in ministries as parish nurse, property resources manager, chorister and head of the welcome ministry. A great blessing to her parish, she is loved and appreciated by all.

**John Small, ODT**  
*St. Jude, Wexford*

Mr. Small was nominated by St. Jude, Wexford for outstanding and dedicated service over the past 54 years. He has been an instrumental force in keeping the gardens of St. Jude's seasonal and



**The Order of the Diocese of Toronto recipients receive a standing ovation after their investiture at St. James Cathedral. The order's medallions depict the dove of peace and the diocese's coat of arms. PHOTOS BY MICHAEL HUDSON**

attractive and has volunteered inside the church in countless ways and beyond, including on the board of Flemington Park Ministry. Willing to help and care for all members of his beloved parish, he keeps people connected to know Christ's love and compassion.

**Marion Stephens, ODT**  
*Resurrection*

Ms. Stephens was nominated by Resurrection for wise and prayerful servant leadership, but it is her love of people that stands out. Dedicated to welcoming and caring for members, especially newcomers to Canada and refugees, she is known as the person to come to for help in times of trouble. Ready at the door with a good soup, she is a beautiful lady of great heart and filled with energy.

**Pansy Stewart, ODT**  
*St. Paul the Apostle, Rexdale*

Mrs. Stewart was nominated by St. Paul

the Apostle, Rexdale for over five decades of faithful membership in her beloved parish, giving generously of her time and talent. Affectionately known as the "master" of the church kitchen, she has fed many and is always available and willing to help with parish events, liturgical life, fundraising and outreach ministries. She is a loved member of St. Paul's who embodies sharing the love of Christ with others.

**Darlene Trumper, ODT**  
*Christ Church St. James*

Mrs. Trumper was nominated by Christ Church St. James for exemplary faith in Jesus and service to God in the church and wider community. Her commitment to serving and helping others by knitting hats and scarves for those without and annually packaging over 30,000 tea bags at the food pantry, despite numerous physical challenges, is an inspiration worthy of imitation and admiration. Christ Church gives thanks to God for her!



## Hope appears in perilous places



BY THE REV. CANON DR.  
CHRISTOPHER BRITTAIN

The first full day of the diocesan delegation's visit to the Holy Land began, fittingly, on the Mount of Olives, where we visited the Princess Basma Centre for Disabled Children. Run by the Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem, this amazing institution is dedicated to treating Palestinian children with disabilities. It also works intentionally to teach and empower parents to understand and better support such children. I was deeply moved and inspired by the experience.

"Basma" means "smile" in Arabic, and this facility was full of displays of joy: smiling children, smiling hospital staff and teachers, and smiling parents. While there, the delegation watched a video of a satellite program in Gaza that is run by the centre. In a small cardboard hut, a nurse and a therapist treat children with various disabilities in the context of what continues to be a war zone.

Watching this video, and hearing of stories of how difficult it was for Palestinians living in the West Bank to access this care facility due to being denied the necessary entry pass for Jerusalem or due to checkpoints being closed, brought to my mind these words from the prophet Isaiah: "The infant will play near the cobra's den, and the young child will put its hand into the viper's nest. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain" (Isaiah 11:8). The Princess Basma Centre offers one example of this image being lived out faithfully in a perilous context.

Later that afternoon, we travelled to west Jerusalem to meet with the biblical scholar and Jesuit priest David Neuhaus. Born in South Africa to a Jewish family, at the age of 15 Dr. Neuhaus was sent by his parents to a school in Jerusalem. He told us that, upon arrival, he saw that apartheid South Africa and Israeli society shared much in common in the way that significant portions of the population were treated as second-class citizens. Despite this impression, he became so attached to the region that he made it his home. After converting to Christianity and joining the Jesuits, he eventually settled at the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Jerusalem.

Our conversation with Dr. Neuhaus was challenging – not only due to his blunt description of the injustices imposed on Palestinians, but also because he highlighted ways Christianity is sometimes used to reinforce such acts. More than one of us sat up straight when he declared, "The bible can be vicious poison." His point was to emphasize the ways in which scripture is



The Dome of the Rock, a Muslim shrine in Jerusalem. The peace that once prevailed here has been replaced by fear and intimidation. PHOTO BY THE REV. STEVE BERUBE

frequently used in narrow and self-serving ways to justify injustice and violence. His concern was particularly with how the bible is employed as a weapon by some in the State of Israel to justify the displacement of Palestinians from their land.

Yet, even as Dr. Neuhaus criticized the treatment of Palestinians by the State of Israel and by the aggressive settler movement in the West Bank, he also acknowledged that "anti-Semitism is real." That this terrible reality continues to fuel the crisis in Palestine is tragically poignant in the wake of the attack on a Hanukkah celebration in Australia.

When asked where he sees signs of hope, Dr. Neuhaus soberly suggested there were few positive signs for the future in the Holy Land. Instead, he shared that he finds encouragement by looking to the past: "It's not always been like this." He reminded us that until around 1936, Jews, Christians and Muslims in the Holy Land lived as neighbours and in peace. Remembering that the present conflicts and atrocities don't define what is possible in Palestine and Israel can nurture a prophetic imagination, he suggested.

These words echoed what one of the leaders of Sabeel, the organization hosting our visit, shared with us. He sug-

gested that faith in the empty tomb is not something that encourages us to pray, "Lord, Lord, great are my problems!" Instead, we are called to pray, "Problems, problems, great is our God."

Although this was only the delegation's first day of encountering the struggles of Palestinians in the region, it was already clear to everyone in our group that we were going to be deeply impacted by what we were witnessing. Later that evening, this realization began to sink in as we were walking through the Christian Quarter of the Old City. Some in the group decided to get a small tattoo on their arm to mark this profound moment in our lives. Whether it was visible or not, we had already recognized that this trip was going to change us permanently.

The Rev. Canon Dr. Christopher Brittain is the Dean of Divinity at Trinity College, Toronto.

## Power displaces prayer



BY THE REV. STEVE BERUBE

*Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing.* — Matthew 23:37

In 1997, when Sue and I first visited the Temple Mount (known in Arabic as Haram al-Sharif) in Jerusalem, we wandered through the courtyards in awe of both the beauty and the sense of welcome. Sue looked at me and said, "This must be the most peaceful place on earth." And it truly felt that way. Tourists moved freely, pausing to photograph the Dome of the Rock gleaming in the sun. Men sat studying with open Korans, mothers watched their children play, and Muslim worshippers smiled and welcomed us. It was serene, beautiful, and above all, peaceful.

When I returned in 2013, something had changed. The familiar rhythms were still there – children playing, men studying, worshippers gathering – but

the feeling was different. Armed Israeli soldiers stood at the entrances, showing open disdain toward Palestinians entering the compound. There was still a sense of peace, but now it felt as if violence could erupt at any moment.

When our delegation visited on Dec. 3, that fragile sense of peace was gone. There were more Israeli military personnel at the entrances, challenging every Palestinian who sought to enter the compound. We were warned by our guide to remain at least 50 metres away from any Israelis who were walking about surrounded by armed soldiers. "And don't take any pictures of them," he warned. The passage from Matthew 23:37 quickly came to mind and stayed with me.

Inside the Al Aqsa Mosque that was once filled with hundreds of daily worshippers, there were now only a handful of people praying. Instead of focusing on the beauty of the mosque, our eyes were drawn to the walls and marble columns scarred by bullet holes, and to the broken windows. Our guide told us that any repairs require authorization from Israeli authorities. We also learned that, as a daily show of force, Israeli soldiers enter Al Aqsa every morning to ensure that no unauthorized work has taken place. The peace that once prevailed had been replaced by intimidation and fear arising from an overwhelming military presence.

After leaving the Temple Mount, we made our way to an entrance to the Western Wall. At the security gate, Omar Harnay, the executive director of Sabeel, was questioned in Hebrew by a young guard. Omar politely replied that he did not speak Hebrew. Although the guard communicated in English with others, he declined to speak English to him. Despite Omar's legal right, as a resident of Jerusalem, to enter, we were told, "Your group can go. But not him." Our group chose to stand in solidarity with Omar. This moment was not unusual for him; it was simply another example of the daily indignities imposed on Palestinians by Israeli authorities intent on asserting their power. I was proud of our group's faithful decision.

At the end of the afternoon, we gathered. Continued on Page 12

# The hard and the hopeful

Continued from Page 1

and human rights of Palestinians and works non-violently for a just and durable peace for Palestinians and Israelis.

Over 10 days, our delegation would spend time in East Jerusalem and in the West Bank, most notably in Bethlehem, Ramallah, Taybeh, Hebron and the hills south of Hebron. We would listen to the stories of academics, artists, church leaders, advocates, farmers, shepherds and ordinary people living in challenging and inhumane conditions. For 10 days we would be invited to hold in one hand the beauty and holiness of pilgrimage sites like the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, the Church of the Nativity, the Western

Wall and a fertile land, and in the other to dwell in a place where people are partitioned, segregated and diminished by a system of repression.

Each member of our delegation will write a reflection on what we experienced – the challenging, the hard, the bewildering and the hopeful. We are calling this series "Happening Now in Palestine."

The season of Advent points towards Christmas, to the love of God made known in the birth of Jesus to Mary and Joseph in Bethlehem, at a time when the land was occupied. Now as then, we pray for peace, shalom, salaam in the Land of the Holy One.



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ered at the Rossing Center for Education and Dialogue, an interreligious organization based in Jerusalem that promotes peace, justice and equality for all people. Hana Bendcowsky spoke candidly about the deep fear felt by both Palestinians and Israelis, and about the growing inability, on all sides, to recognize each other's pain. "Everyone is traumatized," she said. Jews often see themselves as a minority with little power, while Palestinians experience themselves as living under oppression with even less power. She also spoke about how uniforms and weapons represent protection and security for Israelis, while those same symbols evoke violence and death for Palestinians. Despite immense challenges, the Rossing Center continues to develop programs that foster healing and understanding, grounded in the belief that acknowledging trauma is essential to any movement toward peace with justice and security. Their work is difficult, but deeply necessary.

As we continue through Advent, we are invited to wait, not in sentimentality, but in witnessing truth. The child we prepare to welcome was born into a land under military occupation, where fear, surveillance and the daily presence of armed power were part of ordinary life. Jesus knew what it meant to live under empire, to walk streets watched by soldiers, and to belong to a people whose dignity was constantly threatened. Advent asks us not to look away from that reality, but to hold it prayerfully before God. In our waiting, may our ears be opened to listen more deeply to the cries of those who live under occupation, and may our eyes be opened to Christ's way of a commitment to justice, peace and the costly work of love.

*The Rev. Steve Berube is a minister in the United Church of Canada and the vice-chair of Canadian Friends of Sabeel who, along with Sabeel in Jerusalem, organized the delegation.*

## Walls witness daily survival



BY THE REV. GERLYN HENRY

The first time I saw a bullet wound was when I was a chaplain in a children's hospital in Atlanta. It was on the arm of a nine-year-old girl who, while in her house, was caught in the middle of a drive-by shooter and the man he tried to shoot. The bullet grazed her arm, tearing open her flesh an inch deep. The second time was on the side of an elementary school for girls inside the wall in East Jerusalem – 100 holes, an inch deep.

On the third full day of our pilgrimage, Omar, the executive director of Sabeel and our guide for the day, led us on the Contemporary Way of the Cross – a 14-station liturgical journey to look deeply and prayerfully into the lives of Palestinians. We were invited to see the many crosses that people are carrying, from loss of their right to live in the city of their birth, to checkpoints, settlements, prisons, the wall and more. The third station took us to Shu'fat, near Anathoth (where the prophet Jeremiah was from) to see and reflect on the plight of Palestinians living inside the wall in Jerusalem.

The Shu'fat neighbourhood is patrolled by a checkpoint that includes a pedestrian gate with barbed wire on metal fences. The neighbourhood inside the wall is very different from the one outside. It is dense, the roads narrow, water tanks on roofs, with very long lines of vehicles waiting to exit the checkpoint. Building permits, we are told, are very rarely granted to Palestinians in East Jerusalem. Yet people live in structures built in recent



**The wall in East Jerusalem and bullet holes in the wall of the girls' school in Shu'fat. Top right, the Christmas tree in Bethlehem is lit for the first time in two years. PHOTOS BY THE REV. GERLYN HENRY AND THE REV. DR. ALVARDO ADDERLEY**

years, assuming the risk of demolition by Israeli authorities and assuming the risks that come with structures built without permits.

Children of Shu'fat occasionally throw stones as resistance to their living conditions. They throw stones at the gate, at the checkpoint and, less often, at Israeli soldiers. The response is disproportionate. Sometimes children who throw stones are killed or injured. Other times, children are kidnapped from schools and interrogated for information on who the stone throwers are. Periodically, the children who are interrogated are offered a deal to serve as spies and police their classmates and neighbours. The worst consequence for stone throwers is being arrested and taken to Ofer detention centre, which we visited to pray the 10th station: "Child Prisoners."

Usually, boys are the ones who throw stones. But the girls' school in Shu'fat is the one with the bullet holes. Omar asked us to guess why this was the case. It turned out to be far simpler than the scenarios we came up with: the girls' school was more visible from the main street. The wall served as the inch-deep reminder to anyone who might consider bending down to pick up a rock that guns are more powerful than stones.

In the same way that the 10-year-old girl in Atlanta will bear the bullet wound reminding her of the ludicrousness of drive-by shootings, the families of Shu'fat bear the bullet wounds on the side of the school as a reminder of the weight of survival under military occupation.

We ended the Way of the Cross at the Ramallah checkpoint (a city in the West Bank) where a bright red sign read, "This road leads to a Palestinian village. The entrance for Israeli citizens is dangerous." The wall, eight metres high, loomed over us as we prayed, "Lord Jesus, whose death on the cross tore down the barrier between God and his people, in whom there are no distinctions of nationality, gender or status, break down these walls of hatred, both physical and emotional, in the power of your spirit and for the furtherance of your kingdom."

And in the desert, from a red SUV, we heard the voice of one crying out, "Don't believe the sign! It's not dangerous. We are very welcoming people!" And as if we had rehearsed it, the delegation of nine responded in a chorus, "Oh, we know," and I saw thumbs go up in my peripheral vision. It was John the Baptist in the flesh, reminding us that the kingdom of God was at hand, and no wall or sign could obstruct the view.

The Stations of the Cross that day, though painfully difficult, culminated in hope. Hope in a God who is good and just. Hope that God's goodness will triumph



over evil and hatred. Omar said something that day that I've repeated many times since I've been back: "If the millions of Christians who've known the Church since its birth saw that the Church today was overwhelmed, they would be disappointed."

These stories and reflections can feel overwhelming to many of us. But the Church is not overwhelmed. We are a people of witness. And it's a gift to be able to bear witness to what is happening in Palestine.

*The Rev. Gerlyn Henry is the incumbent of Holy Wisdom in Toronto.*

## Art exposes harsh realities



BY THE REV. MICHAEL STUCHBERY

At Dar Al Kaima University in Bethlehem, resistance to the Occupation is played out in visual arts, film, performing arts and other creative fields of expression. This beautifully designed campus is filled with young Palestinians expressing their lived experience, as well as their lively hope through the arts. The artwork we saw was both hard to look at and yet vibrant and filled with the promise of something better. Some of their films have gone on to receive international awards. Our conversation with the school's founder, the Rev. Dr. Mitri Raheb, challenged us as Church, suggesting that we "missed a curve" somewhere in the past and have failed to live up to Jesus' concern for the oppressed. Can we find our way back?

The environmental devastation of Palestine – one of the little-discussed but major impacts of the Occupation – is front and centre at the Environmental Education Centre. The Jordan River is now not much more than a stream. The Dead Sea will be pretty much gone in 20 years. The wetlands of the north have been drained for settler housing. Deforestation around the settlements, and then reforestation with invasive species, is acidifying the soil and creating a monoculture. Like Mitri Raheb at Dar Al Kaima, Mazin Qumsiyeh, the founder of the centre, spoke passionately about the issues with great wisdom, gentleness and humour – instead of the anger and rage one might expect. In their efforts to restore biodiversity, they lovingly nurture native plants for future dis-



persion. They work one orchid at a time at the slow pace of God's Kairos time.

The brutality of the artwork we saw at the university and the staggering destruction of the Palestinian environment (multiplied in Gaza by the equivalent of 11 times the bombing destruction of Hiroshima) was enough for one day. But then we encountered the wall blocking Bethlehem from Jerusalem: part of an 810-km structure that runs between Palestinian towns across the West Bank, cutting each community off with armed checkpoints and random road access closings. Where we were standing, it was three storeys of ugly cement, capped by razor wire and covered in graffiti – some very clever, all of it expressing the rage over the unnecessary disruption of people's lives. It makes getting to work or medical appointments challenging and at times even impossible; and because of the military permits required to visit other towns, families are also cut off from each other.

Across the road from the wall is the "Walled Off Hotel," a parody of an old-style Waldorf Astoria hotel created by British artist Banksy. His cutting and dark humour brings out the reality of life behind the wall. The entrance lounge contains a caged dove of peace, mantelpiece decorations consisting of CCTV cameras and slingshots, to name just a couple of the "artistic" touches. The nine-room hotel also includes a museum to the wall and the Occupation. One of the final exhibits, relating to the ongoing war in Gaza, is a simple ringing telephone. When you answer it, you hear a recorded message saying (to the best of my recollection): "The Israeli Defence Force will be bombing your building in five minutes. Please evacuate immediately." With his gift for "cutting through the crap," Banksy sums up the insanity, brutality, absurdity and Kafkaesque reality of life behind the wall quite succinctly.

And yet, this "little town of Bethlehem" (not actually so little) is the same town, occupied then as now, where our faith story tells us Jesus was born. Banksy has nothing on God when it comes to irony: God becoming flesh in an occupied town, in a barn, to ordinary people, to give life and dignity to those who "live behind the wall." Talk about a dark sense of humour! Brutal insanity, sadly, yes – but also resilient hope in the promise of that Bethlehem birth. On this day, we saw them both clearly.

*The Rev. Michael Stuchbery is the incumbent of St. Philip, Etobicoke.*

## Hope shines in the darkness



BY THE REV. DR. ALVARDO ADDERLEY

What's happening in Israel/Palestine? Admittedly, if I was asked this question before our pilgrimage to the Holy Land, my answer would have probably been vague or ill-informed. Not

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because of my lack of knowledge of events surrounding the conflict between Israel and Palestine, but simply because as humans we often focus on the things that affect us directly.

On Dec. 6, we visited an area called Taybeh. To lend some historical context: Taybeh is one of the most ancient places in Palestine, dating back to the Bronze Age, and is mentioned in the Book of Joshua as Ofra, a town of Benjamin. In New Testament times it was known as Ephraim, the village to which Jesus chose to retire with his disciples after the resurrection of Lazarus to fortify his spirit, pray and fast before his return to Jerusalem and his Passion. Notably, Taybeh is surrounded by Muslim villages, Israeli settlements and military roadblocks, yet it has an all-Christian population, the only 100% Christian village in Palestine. The people of Taybeh belong to three Christian denominations: the Latin (Roman Catholic) Church, the Greek Orthodox Church and the Melkite (Greek Catholic) Church.

Remarkably, within the grounds of the Latin Church of Christ the Redeemer, there is a reconstruction of a traditional Palestinian peasant home, which we were privileged to tour. Taybeh is an area that once had a population of 15,000. Presently, both because of the ongoing conflict between Israel and Palestine and the occupation, which means Taybeh is living under military law, many persons have migrated to Canada, Germany or the U.S. This, of course, was evident in the empty streets and many deserted buildings that comprised the town. However, Taybeh is also famous for having its own brewery and Oktoberfest celebration. The brewery, launched in 1994, is one of two in Palestine, and as of 2014 also produces its own wine.

We were privileged to have an audience with Fr. Bashar Fawadleh, the parish priest of the Latin Church of Christ the Redeemer, who explained the difficulties that so many families face within the community. He described the tension and fear that the community was feeling, and the ongoing harassment that the people endure from Israeli soldiers and settlers alike. In fact, on the day he spoke with us, he made us aware of an attack on the community the night before. After a Christmas celebration gathering, two vehicles in the town were set on fire by Israeli settlers. Thankfully, nobody was injured.

Regardless of the struggles, Fr. Fawadleh expressed how hopeful the people of Taybeh are to celebrate Christmas, especially considering what has transpired within the country in the last two years with the war in Gaza. I can recall sinking in my chair as he spoke and explained to us in detail the challenges within the community and church at large. However, when asked by Bishop Asbil, “What keeps you going? What gives you hope?” he responded without any hesitation, saying, “Your presence. With you all visiting, it makes us feel as though we are not alone.” This response, which will stay with me for a long time, was transformative and encouraging, for it truly defined what we recite in the creed: “We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic church.” Yes, we are universal, we are one, and we walk hand-in-hand with one another regardless of the distance.

Moments later we were back on the bus to go on our way to Bethlehem, where our Christian faith first started. I can still recall the bus ride. It was quiet and reflective. I could hear people think and ponder as we all sat with what was told to us by Fr. Fawadleh and others thus far on our trip.

About 30 minutes later, the bus stopped and there we all stood in the front of the Church of the Nativity. “Wow!” I thought,



Delegation members meet with Issa Amro, a renowned activist and Nobel Peace Prize nominee. At right, Lulu and Sami Nasir, whose daughter Layan has been detained in an Israeli prison despite not having been charged with a crime. PHOTOS BY THE REV. CANON NICOLA SKINNER AND THE REV. DR. JEFF NOWERS

“in the midst of all that is happening, we are standing only steps away from the church that is believed to be built over the birthplace of Jesus.” And then it happened, the countdown to the lighting of the Christmas tree. People cheering, some crying, emotions running wild. Then we heard “10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1,” and the tree was lit. With goosebumps, and tears in my eyes, I watched people celebrate with hope and expectation. As a result of the war in Gaza, this was the first time in two years that the tree was lit in the square. For the first time in my life, Romans 5:3 – “but we rejoice in our sufferings” – became so alive and real. In that moment, I stood among a people who, though oppressed, walled in and marginalized, exemplified Romans 5:3.

Like the Apostle Paul, although there’s much pain and persecution among Palestinians, they also show much joy. In the midst of everything, they continue to show that hope and confidence in God dominates their outlook on life. Yet we may ask, what enables Palestinians to live with such paradoxes? It is their faith in a God of boundless love who holds the future in his hands. It is a faith that is unshakeable even in the midst of distress. It is a faith that gives a new outlook on life. It is a faith that says suffering and blessing are not necessarily contradictory. It is possible to have and experience both.

Now fast-forward to Dec. 19. Having visited Israel/Palestine, my experience and knowledge have been informed through the lens of those living within the walls of conflict. And so I write with the hope and expectation that my experience would enlighten, inform and bring about the change that is desperately needed in Israel/Palestine, as well as in other parts of the world. Nelson Mandela once stated that “education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.” This trip provided us all with that world-changing education.

*The Rev. Dr. Alvaro Adderley is the incumbent of St. George Memorial, Oshawa.*

## Faith thrives despite hardship



BY THE REV. DR. JEFF NOWERS

On day seven of our pilgrimage – Sunday – our trustworthy driver Zuzu picked us up after breakfast to drive us to Ramallah, where we would visit St. Andrew’s parish and join the community’s patronal festivities. We would also meet with Archbishop Hosam Naoum, primate of the Province of Jerusalem and the Middle East – a vast territory that includes Egypt, Ethiopia,

Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria.

Depending on traffic, Ramallah is at least a half-hour drive north of Jerusalem. The two cities, separated by checkpoints and the notorious Wall, stand in stark contrast to one another. In Jerusalem, Haredi Jews stroll the sidewalks. Billboards and shop signs are in Hebrew. Many roads, while exceptionally congested, are wide enough to accommodate multiple lanes. In Ramallah, however, Arabic is ubiquitous. Jews are rarely, if ever, seen. The terrain is hilly, streets are narrower, and motorists make liberal use of their horns. Many women wear a hijab. Hagop Djernazian, a Sabeel staff member who accompanied us for the day, remarked that Ramallah is culturally and topographically a smaller version of Amman, Jordan.

We arrived at St. Andrew’s Church, located at the end of a short easy-to-miss alley. The parish is led by Father Fadi Diab, a courageous priest who played a major role in the writing of the 2009 Kairos Palestine Document – an impassioned ecumenical call for an end to Israel’s illegal occupation. In August 2022, Israeli forces raided St. Andrew’s and the adjacent Al Haq human rights organization. Father Fadi’s strong pastoral presence helped the congregation remain resolute in the aftermath of this attack.

Once inside the church, we made our way into the nave, a modest space framed by stone walls, with the chancel archway stunningly decorated to simulate a cave entrance. Beside the chancel steps, a small organ was played by a man with an infectious smile who welcomed us warmly. Families trickled in, filling the pews from front to back in anticipation of Archbishop Hosam’s arrival. At the beginning of the service, Father Fadi invited Bishop Andrew to light the second candle of the Advent wreath – an experience that would, as he shared later in the evening, almost bring him to tears. The service proceeded in Arabic, in a simple but reverent manner, with familiar rhythms and hymn tunes that allowed us to follow along easily.

Archbishop Hosam, whose formidable stature belies his gentle and gracious disposition, rose to deliver his homily. Speaking in Arabic for several minutes, he concluded with a word in English. Focusing his attention on the gospel, he drew a strong connection between John the Baptist’s prophetic witness and the Advent theme of peace. We must, he insisted, embrace John’s prophetic call and be agents and ambassadors of peace. That is how we will “prepare the way of the Lord” and “make his paths straight.”

The climax of the service was the Eucharist, with everyone – including a toddler who had been running up and down the centre aisle – eagerly lining



up to receive the sacrament. The consecrated bread was not the dry, tasteless little discs that are so common in our diocese. Instead, the archbishop broke off generous pieces of a freshly baked loaf, dipping them himself in the chalice and then offering them to all communicants. During this time, communion hymns were sung joyfully and resoundingly. Despite living under oppressive occupation, these Christians showed an unmistakable depth of faith and perseverance.

After the service, some of us were privileged to meet parishioners Sami and Lulu Nasir. Their daughter Layan, age 25, has been in and out of “administrative detention” since 2021 and currently languishes (along with thousands of other Palestinians) in an Israeli prison, for no justifiable reason. Her case has received international attention, prompting several archbishops to demand her immediate release. Layan’s parents are prevented from making any contact with her. As Lulu tearfully shared with us the impact of this ordeal, I was unable to contain my own emotions. It was a profoundly unsettling moment for me that powerfully evoked the oft-recited intercession “for prisoners and captives, and for their safety, health, and salvation.”

The heaviness of that moment temporarily gave way to a wonderfully catered dinner in the parish hall. We were then ushered into a side room for a meeting with Archbishop Hosam. He shared with us some of his own work and the grim challenges facing Anglicans in Palestine, especially in the wake of Oct. 7. At the conclusion of the meeting, we laid hands on the archbishop as Bishop Andrew offered a prayer and blessing. Archbishop Hosam responded by praying for us and blessing our work.

Before departing for Jerusalem, we joined Archbishop Hosam for the blessing and dedication of a newly renovated facility that will provide affordable housing for women moving to Ramallah for employment opportunities. As we toured the building, I lingered in the small chapel. Through the window directly behind the altar, large water storage tanks were clearly visible – an arresting reminder of the water shortages that Palestinians

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endure. Israel controls 85% of the water in the Holy Land, selling the remaining 15% to Palestinians.

The drive back to Jerusalem was much longer because of an interminable checkpoint line – again, another reality that suffocates Palestinian movement. It gave me much time to ponder the day, both the dismal and the joyful elements. Above all, I was astonished by the tenacity of faith and undeterred confidence that we witnessed among these Christians of Ramallah.

*The Rev. Dr. Jeff Nowers is the incumbent of Christ the King in Toronto and a member of the board of directors of Canadian Friends of Sabeel.*

## Families bear heaviest cost



BY THE REV. CANON  
NICOLA SKINNER

**W**hat does it look like to live with constant fear and never have a peaceful night's sleep?

How do you play outside with your small children when your husband's shameless murderer is living next door to your property? How do you relax in your own home when a soldier with a machine gun stands overlooking your garden 24/7? The home that has been declared a "closed military zone" or simply fair game for settlers to steal? This was a very heavy day on our solidarity visit.

In Hebron and then in the south Hebron hills, we visited the home of renowned activist and Nobel Peace Prize nominee Issa Amro, and the Bedouin village of Umm al-Khair, subject of the BBC documentary *No Other Land*. Issa founded Youth Against Settlements (YAS) in 2007 and is the recipient of many awards and honours for his continuous non-violent civil resistance. The *New York Times Magazine* even named him "the Palestinian Gandhi." For his commitment to the Palestinian cause, Issa has been regularly arrested, detained and beaten by soldiers and by settlers. On one occasion he was bound, zip-tied and tortured for 10 hours, resulting in lasting injuries, both physical and psychological. So far, the crimes he has been accused of are heinous acts such as "insulting an Israeli soldier" or "being on a march without a permit." The man we met was inspiring, brave and passionate, but we also witnessed the massive toll his choice to continue is taking. I thought of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane as we sat in his garden looking out at his olive trees. Jesus prayed, "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet, not my will but yours be done." Issa is a man who has set his face towards justice and is prepared to walk the road of suffering if that is what is required of him.

As we turned into the Bedouin village of Umm al-Khair, we immediately saw the brazenness of the Israeli colonial land grab, for this is what the whole conflict boils down to. A paved road cuts straight through Umm Al-Khair and leads to the fortified gate of the Carmel settlement. When a settler claims land, the state of Israel immediately ratifies it with hydro, water and military assistance. Bedouin land and property was bulldozed so that the settlers could make their presence felt as they drive past the villagers day and night. On July 28, 2025, Awdah Hathaleen was holding his toddler in his arms, urging the notoriously violent settler Yinon Levy not to tear up their land with his bulldozer. Yinon Levy responded to a cry for justice by shooting Awdah dead. Gerlyn, Sylvia and I were graciously taken into the family home to meet Awdah's widow, Hanadi. Her grief is



The red soil of the Tent of Nations farm with Israeli settler caravans against the fence and settler homes on the hillside. PHOTO BY DR. SYLVIA KEESMAAT

still very raw, and her fear was palpable. We mostly sat with her in silence as there were no words that seemed sufficient. She told us that her little boy wakes up screaming and remembers being covered in his father's blood. He couldn't even eat a sauce she makes from beans because it looks too sanguinous. Every day unlocks a new piece of the trauma for her. At 25, with three small children and now a widow, Hanadi told us that she feels as though all of her hopes and dreams have been destroyed. She and Awdah had been preparing to come to Canada to study. Without him, that dream has died too.

Outside, the men from our group met with the Hathaleen men to learn more of the difficulties they face. I could not help but notice the gentle hospitality of the men we met and their incredible tenderness toward the little children – children who are not having the childhood they deserve. We could hear the voices of the Carmel children playing in a school or daycare behind the fortified barrier just a few hundred metres away, laughing with none of the terror that Hanadi's children live with. Yet they are also living in their own kind of cage in a land of razor wire, violence, hatred and apartheid. What kind of a life is that? Is this the land flowing with milk and honey they hoped for? Or must it require the murder and displacement of others to make it so? With the whole of Umm Al Khair under a demolition order, it now seems only a matter of time before Carmel swallows the Bedouin land and leaves the villagers homeless.

So many questions, so much pain, so much injustice. I lay on my bed that night with a heavy heart. The Psalms and the persistent cry of "How long, O Lord?" came to mind. On a day when we met a truly worthy Nobel Peace Prize nominee and a grief-stricken young woman whose husband's callous murderer has been exonerated of sanctions by the Prize-hungry U.S. president, the cry of the psalmist for mercy and justice is as necessary today as it always has been. In many years of parish ministry, I have often been asked, "Do we really have to say the psalm each week? They are so whiny and complaining." My answer has always been yes. They are the raw, honest, saccharine-free cries of the human heart. You may not be feeling those particular psalms today, but one day you might just identify with them. On that land, in that place, the psalms are as potent as ever. How long, O Lord, how long, indeed?

*The Rev. Canon Nicola Skinner is the incumbent of Grace Church, Markham.*

## Farm survives amid occupation



BY DR. SYLVIA KEESMAAT

**D**aoud Nassar and his family live on a hill-top farm near Bethlehem called Tent of Nations. Their terraced land produces abundant harvests of olives, grapes and apricots. Their fertile land is the red arable loam that is called 'adamah in Genesis 1, the earth from which humanity, 'adam, is formed. Looking down, we see the winter crocuses that Isaiah mentions in Isaiah 35:1, and looking up it is possible to see the Mediterranean on a clear day. There are cisterns to collect water, composting toilets to create nutrients, solar panels for energy, and artwork on doors and walls. It seems like an idyllic place.

Until you hear the stories. The abundant harvests have been disrupted by Israeli settlers bulldozing the apricot trees, burning 1,500 olive trees and destroying grape vines. The cisterns are underground because Israeli settlers have repeatedly destroyed above-ground water storage tanks. The composting toilets and solar panels are necessary because Israel has cut off water and electricity to the farm. The artwork is in caves that, unlike buildings, the settlers cannot destroy, and the colourful paintings are a form of creative resistance against violence. Moreover, the Israeli state has been trying to seize this land for 35 years, embroiling the Nassar family in endless legal battles in spite of documents that demonstrate their ownership.

The view is disrupted by Israeli settler homes, not only on the surrounding hills, but also built against the fence line of the farm. The road to town has been blocked, cutting the farm off from neighbours. And looking in the direction of the Mediterranean, Daoud says quietly: "We could see the bombs falling on Gaza from here." And we realize that it is all of a piece; the violent attempt to exterminate this farm is part of the larger systemic plan to destroy the Palestinian people and their connection to this land.

And yet the motto of Tent of Nations is: "We refuse to be enemies." Many of the trees that were destroyed were replanted by Jewish groups from the U.K. and the Centre for Jewish Non-Violence from the United States. Many international volunteers are welcomed here, for when visitors arrive the violence pauses.

Like Naboth in 1 Kings 24, Daoud has

been encouraged to sell the land; he just has to name his price. But like Naboth, he can't imagine living apart from the land that has grounded his family for generations. "This is our inheritance," he says. "This is the place we call home." Daoud is committed to staying on this land in spite of the challenges, so that Tent of Nations might continue to be a place of reconciliation for diverse peoples and a place of ecological renewal for the land.

Such an emphasis on reconciliation is also at the heart of Wi'am: The Palestinian Conflict Transformation Center, where we ended our day. With special programs for women, youth and those dealing with trauma, Zoughbi Alzoughbi, the founder and director, provided insight into the difficulties of reconciliation in the midst of a traumatized population. "There is no trauma healing, only trauma coping," he says, "because there is no post-traumatic stress disorder here; the trauma is ongoing." Wi'am seeks to engage community-based mediation as a pathway to transformation in the midst of violence. Zoughbi does this work at great personal cost: he is married to an American whom Israel will not allow to live in Palestine with him. The separation wall that casts its shadow over the Wi'am building represents how the state of Israel extends its reach into the personal and familial lives of so many Palestinians.

Between Tent of Nations and Wi'am, we experienced two moments of juxtaposition. The first was one of the amazing meals that punctuated our trip, reminding us that even in the midst of violence, Palestinian life continues with moments of deep joy and nourishment.

The other was the Church of the Nativity – the visually rich, large church complex built over the place where Jesus was supposedly born. Like at Tent of Nations, we descended into a cave, but this one was richly lit with lamps and beautiful artwork commemorating the birth of Jesus.

At the end of the day, I pondered where we had truly seen evidence of the incarnation. Was it in the sumptuously decorated church? Or did we see God become flesh in a centre for conflict transformation in the shadow of the Separation Wall? Perhaps. And perhaps God has come to live among us on the land of a farm that is planting literal seeds of hope and reconciliation in the rich red loam of Palestine.

*Dr. Sylvia Keesmaat teaches online at Bible Remixed and speaks and preaches frequently in the Diocese of Toronto.*



Parish supports college students 1

VICTORIA - Julian of Norwich parish in the Diocese of Islands and Inlets has launched an innovative project, Julian's Place, to support the food, financial and spiritual needs of students at nearby Algonquin College.

With a grant of \$7,815 from the diocese's Future Fund, the parish invites students to "come over to Julian's Place" once a month for a warm meal, to check out the affordable Nearly New Shop and renew their sense of well-being by walking a labyrinth in the parish hall.

The grant was among the first three approved by the Future Fund, which was launched in 2024 to support innovative and effective initiatives that foster engagement with the wider community and the formation of new worshipping communities.

The parish saw that among Algonquin College's 20,000 students, there were concerns about the rising costs of food, affordable housing and education.

"Our parish anticipates that developing relationships with Algonquin students through Julian's Place will plant seeds for a more fulsome and sustained engagement between students, the Julian community and the college itself," says the Rev. Karen McBride.

Three students from the college's culinary skills program have been recruited to work with parish volunteers. They each get a \$100 honorarium to lead the cooking and serving. A website design student has been awarded a \$500 honorarium to build a new parish website.  
*Faith Tides*

Jazz vespers draws a crowd 2

OTTAWA - The Parish of South Carleton has received a Future Fund grant of \$4,085 to help expand its jazz vespers program. "We're very grateful for the grant and support from our diocese," says the Rev. Allan Budzin.



Mr. Budzin is a jazz fan. When he was a priest in the Diocese of Toronto, his parish offered jazz vespers twice a month for 13 years. Inspired by that experience, "I thought we should take the risk and offer jazz vespers in a rural setting."

The monthly Sunday afternoon jazz vespers services at St. Paul, Osgoode, which began in 2024, have proved him right. "Attendance has been enthusiastic and strong. I think September and October, we had 65 folks, and then even on a dreary November day, we had 75. Several times, a number of people on their way out have thanked me for jazz vespers, and they say, 'It'd be wonderful if this was offered more often.'" So, in the spring, the parish will test out holding services twice a month.

Mr. Budzin estimates that only 12-15 of those attending the vespers are regular Sunday morning parishioners. The rest come specifically for the jazz service. "They just love it, and they find it spiritually supportive and enriching," he says. "It has

really developed into its own kind of worshipping community. On her way out, one woman said, 'I think you're making me a recovering agnostic.' I like that comment."

Mark Ferguson is the leader of the quartet and plays keyboards and trombones. John Geggie is the bass player. Mike Tremblay is the saxophonist. The drummer is Jamie Holmes, and occasionally, for the quintet, Ed Lister is on trumpet. "Some folks scratch their head and say, 'How do you get guys like this to come to Osgoode?' But the musicians love it, too. They're very committed and dedicated," says Mr. Budzin.

The music is not all jazz. It's a mix of music from artists such as Leonard Cohen, Gordon Lightfoot, Joni Mitchell, The Beatles, Duke Ellington, Louis Armstrong, George Gershwin, Stevie Wonder and Burt Bacharach.

Instead of a traditional homily, Mr. Budzin usually reads one or two poems and offers a reflection. He has read poems from Gerard Manley Hopkins, e.e. cummings, Wendell Berry, Mary

Oliver and other less well-known writers, and he usually includes a copy of the poem in the order of service. "I love poetry as much as I love jazz, so I pick a poem that I think people would appreciate," he says. "And so far, I've struck a chord. Some folks have said they've collected all the poems that I've used for jazz vespers and keep them in a little binder."

St. John's church in Richmond has started a monthly Sunday vespers for harp and flute with two exceptional musicians, he adds. "That is doing very well, too. Not quite as high numbers as jazz vespers, but it's getting 25 to 30 people and developing its own group of supporters."  
*Perspective*

Church lends skates 3

WINDSOR - The volunteers who run the city's free skate lending program are having a busy year, with the opening of the new rink in front of city hall — and just steps from their front door.

Art Roth runs All Saints' Anglican Church's skate lending program. Tucked inside the church hall are shelves and shelves of skates, in all sizes. He encourages people to come by and borrow a pair for a few weeks or the winter season.

"It's our gift to the community," he says.

Skate lending at the church started in December and runs until the end of February. The program started more than 20 years ago, with a donation of six pairs of skates from Mr. Roth himself.

He hasn't counted the current inventory, but there are hundreds and hundreds of pairs — maybe close to 1,000 all told, he estimates. Last year, the program lent out skates 1,150 times.

On Saturday mornings, people can go into the church hall, where they'll be fitted with a pair of skates and welcomed to sign them out. The skates come in most sizes and a variety of widths. Due to demand, adult skates are lent out for shorter periods of time, but kids skates can generally be borrowed for the season. There's also a small selection of helmets.

The program lends out skates to a huge variety of people, says Mr. Roth, everyone from families enrolling their child in skating lessons to corporate and church groups for a fun day out on the ice.

In recent years, about half of their loans have been to newcomers to Canada. "It's great," he says. "Some of them come from countries where they've never seen ice, let alone do anything on it, so they're keen to do that."

The program runs on donations, both of skates and money, but it doesn't cost much and the program welcomes skate donations every morning except Sunday. Says Mr. Roth: "Our paycheque, we say, is seeing people happy with a pair of skates and coming back with a big smile and say, 'See you again next year. It's been great. We'll need a new size.'"

*CBC News*

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# Priest to retire after long, full ministry

## Downsview Youth Covenant part of legacy

**ON** Nov. 30, Dean Stephen Hance announced that the Rev. Canon Dr. Stephen Fields, sub-dean of the Diocese of Toronto and vicar of St. James Cathedral, will retire from full-time ministry on June 30. His final Sunday of full-time service at the cathedral will be May 31, the 45th anniversary of his ordination to the diaconate.

Canon Fields was born in Barbados and is a graduate of Codrington College and the University of the West Indies, the General Theological Seminary and the Graduate Theological Foundation. He was ordained to the diaconate in 1981 in Brooklyn, New York, and to the priesthood in 1983 in Barbados.

After serving at several parishes in Barbados, in 1993 he was called to St. Michael and All Angels in Toronto as associate priest. His experience there was foundational for the ministry that would follow. Working with the Rev. Canon John Erb, he got a good look at the life and ministry of the diocese and discerned the shape his own ministry would take.

He went on to serve as incumbent of St. Stephen, Downsview (1996-2011) and Holy Trinity, Thornhill (2011-2021). At St. Stephen's, he helped guide the parish through significant transformation. His

leadership emphasized creative liturgies, a renewed focus on mission and revitalized youth ministry. One notable outcome was the development of the Downsview Youth Covenant, which began as a six-hour program and eventually grew into a board-led corporation.

At Holy Trinity, he sought to make the life of the parish more inclusive by encouraging broad participation in the mission of God. He invited youth and others who had not been fully engaged to offer their gifts in ways that matched their abilities and passions, fostering a sense of belonging and shared purpose.

During his tenure at St. James Cathedral, Canon Fields has worked intentionally to make it a home for the clergy and people of the diocese. He has strengthened its identity as a place of welcome, offering opportunities for curates and other clergy to preach at the main Sunday services and enabling deacons to serve regularly at Sunday celebrations of the Eucharist. He also established the Catechesis for Confirmation program, which in its first year prepared 14 candidates from across the diocese for the Easter confirmation service.

Canon Fields' ministry has extended beyond his parishes. He



The Rev. Canon Dr. Stephen Fields

served on Diocesan Council (now Synod Council), the Postulancy Committee, General Synod, the Council of General Synod, the Pension Committee, the Finance Management Committee and at least 20 other committees, boards and working groups in the diocese and the national Church. He is also a creative liturgist, whose Bob Marley Mass was informed and influenced by the lyrics of seven of Mr. Marley's iconic songs. He is a prolific composer of prayers, most of them based on the gospel readings in the Revised Common Lectionary. The distinguishing

feature of many of these prayers is that they are just one line (LOL – "Lord, One Line").

A significant portion of his ministry was devoted to training and mentoring theological students and young curates. As a member of the Postulancy Committee, he has shared in the discernment of the call to priesthood for many priests who are now serving in the Church.

A strong advocate for social justice, Canon Fields' ministry has been deeply shaped by anti-bias and anti-racism initiatives. He served on the leadership team for the No Longer Strangers project, a diocesan multicultural ministry initiative, and helped to establish the Black Anglicans Coordinating Committee, which has since been succeeded by the Black Anglicans of Canada. This ministry promoted intercultural understanding, celebrated the contributions of Anglicans of African and Caribbean heritage, and encouraged full integration within the diocese and the wider Canadian Church. He proposed a resolution at General Synod 2025 that established the last Sunday of July as Emancipation Sunday in the Anglican Church of Canada.

Canon Fields has also been active in the wider Anglican Communion. He coordinated the fifth Caribbean Anglican Consultation (CAC) held in Toronto in 1999 and helped plan CAC-6 in Nassau, Bahamas, in 2001. These biennial conferences explored the ministry needs of clergy

and congregants from the Caribbean and its diaspora, the contributions of Caribbean Anglicans to their church communities and how the Church could better respond to their needs. He chaired the local planning committee and served on the international planning committee for the Third International Conference on Afro-Anglicanism, a gathering of Black Anglicans from around the world held once every decade.

Throughout his ministry, he has been supported by his wife, Lucy, a retired education administrator; his mother-in-law, Valerie; and his two sons, Marc and Luke. His family has since grown to include two daughters-in-law and three grandchildren. Canon Fields enjoys travelling, cricket and calypso, and still considers himself a student of the guitar, which he plans to take up again in retirement.

Appointed an honorary canon of St. James Cathedral in 2004, Canon Fields has received numerous awards, including the Making a Difference Award (MADA) and the African Canadian Achievement Award for Excellence in Religion, recognizing his ministry in both the Church and the wider community. His work and leadership have been featured in several publications, including both editions of *Who's Who in Black Canada* and *Some Barbadian Canadians: A Biographical Dictionary*.

Staff

## LOOKING AHEAD

To submit items for Looking Ahead, email [editor@toronto.anglican.ca](mailto:editor@toronto.anglican.ca). The deadline for the March issue is Feb. 1. Parishes can also promote their events on the diocese's website Calendar at [www.toronto.anglican.ca](http://www.toronto.anglican.ca).

**JAN. 27** - The Christian-Jewish Dialogue of Toronto is hosting a service for International Holocaust

Remembrance Day from 7:30-8:30 p.m. at the Congregation Darchei Noam, 864 Sheppard Ave. W., Toronto. Through music, scripture, testimony and prayer, the service invites participants to remember the past with reverence, to cherish the resilience of the human spirit and to renew our commitment to building a world rooted in justice, compassion and peace. Registration is required. Visit the diocese's website, [www.toronto.anglican.ca](http://www.toronto.anglican.ca). **FEB. 1** - Bob Marley (Emancipation) Mass, 4:30 p.m., St. James Cathedral to start Black History Month. The theme will be "One Love, One Heart" and the preacher will be the

Rt. Rev. Deon Johnson, bishop of the Diocese of Missouri. Bishop Andrew Asbil will preside. The music will be led by MOKA, a Caribbean fusion band. All are invited.

**FEB. 1** - Choral Evensong with the choir of St. James Cathedral at 4 p.m., followed by an illustrated music feature about the Rev. George Herbert (1593-1633), with Bishop Susan Bell of the Diocese of Niagara, at St. Olave, Bloor Street West and Windermere Avenue, Toronto. **FEB. 18** - Ash Wednesday Exploration Day in the Cathedral, 10:30 a.m., a day of creativity, faith and connection for ages 8-17. Visit [stjamescathedral.ca/exploration-day](http://stjamescathedral.ca/exploration-day).

### IN MOTION

#### Appointments

- The Rev. Susan Tate, Honorary Assistant, St. Paul, Lindsay, Nov. 24, 2025.
- The Rev. Canon John Read, Honorary Assistant, St. John the Baptist, Norway, Dec. 4, 2025.
- The Rev. Canon Victor Li, Honorary Assistant, All Saints, Markham, Dec. 21, 2025.

#### Vacant Incumbencies

Clergy from outside the diocese with the permission of their bishop may apply through the Diocesan Executive Assistant, Canon Mary Conliffe.

#### Bishop's Direct Appointment Process

- (receiving names):
- St. George, Haliburton
- Parish of Bobcaygeon, Dunsford and Burnt River
- Parish of Churchill and Cookstown
- Parish of Campbellford, Hastings and Roseneath
- Parish of Fenelon Falls and Cobocok
- St. Mark, Midland
- St. Peter, Erindale (associate priest)
- All Saints Church-Community Centre
- St. Mary Magdalene

#### Parish Selection Committee Process

**First Phase** - (not yet receiving names):

- St. Stephen, Downsview

**Second Phase** - (receiving names via Bishop):

- St. Andrew, Alliston

**Third Phase** - (no longer receiving names):

- N/A

#### Celebrations of New Ministry

- The Rev. Diane Lee, Priest-in-Charge of St. Matthew, Oshawa, Feb. 7 at 2 p.m.
- The Rev. Jessica Dowling, Incumbent of St. George on-the-Hill, March 15 at 4 p.m.
- The Rev. Diane Lee, Priest-in-Charge of St. Peter, Oshawa, April 18 at 2 p.m.
- The Rev. Frank Morales, Priest-in-Charge of Christ Memorial Church, Oshawa, May 14 at 7 p.m.

#### Retirements

- The Rev. Canon Dr. Judy Paulsen concluded her contract as coordinator of the Season of Spiritual Renewal on Dec. 31, 2025.
- The Rev. Canon Dr. Stephen Fields's last Sunday as sub-dean and vicar of St. James Cathedral will be May 31, 2026.

### PRAYER CYCLE

#### FOR FEBRUARY

1. Bishop's Committee on Interfaith Ministry
2. St. Peter on-the-Rock, Stony Lake
3. The Rice Lake Regional Ministry
4. All Saints, King City
5. Christ Church, Holland Landing
6. Parish of Georgina
7. Parish of Lloydtown
8. Holland Deanery

9. The Sisterhood of St. John the Divine
10. The Clergy of the Diocese of Toronto
11. Parish of Roches Point
12. St. James the Apostle, Sharon
13. St. Paul, Newmarket
14. The Home for the Heart Campaign of the Sisterhood of St. John the Divine
15. Thanksgiving for the Season of Spiritual Renewal
16. Family Ministries
17. Trinity Church, Aurora
18. Ash Wednesday

19. Epiphany and St. Mark, Parkdale
20. St. Anne, Toronto
21. St. George by the Grange
22. Black Anglicans of Canada
23. St. Hilda, Fairbank
24. St. Martin in-the-Fields
25. St. Mary and St. Martha
26. The 50th Anniversary of the Ordination of Women in Canada
27. St. Mary Magdalene
28. St. Matthias, Bellwoods

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