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SPECIAL REPORT

Gone by 2040?

Statistics report a 'wake-up call' to church, says primate

Tali Folkins
STAFF WRITER

Recently released data suggesting the church's rate of decline has not slowed over the past decade and a half—while not surprising—should serve as a useful reality check for Canadian Anglicans, says Archbishop Linda Nicholls, primate of the Anglican Church of Canada.

"I don't think they're a surprise to anybody," Nicholls said of the statistics in an interview with the *Anglican Journal*. "Anybody who's been in the church in the pews, or as a priest, or as a deacon or a bishop has known that this decline has been happening. We see it every Sunday, we see it in lots of ways.

"I think it is a wake-up call... If people are not coming to the church and finding a place of hope and good news, then we have to ask, 'How are we presenting that hope and good news to this current generation and time? And what might need to be tried?'"

See STATISTICS, p. 6

IMAGE: MATTHEW TOWNSEND, ADAPTED FROM PHOTO BY CHARLES PLANT/SHUTTERSTOCK

A LETTER FROM CUBA



Balancing institution, mission: Lessons from a changing church

Episcopal bishop of Cuba offers reflections on the church's role in the world.

THE ROAD AHEAD



What will Sunday morning look like, in the years to come?

Buildings are closing and congregations merging, or even meeting in houses.

GREEN SHOOTS



Community outreach fuels thriving congregations

Following discussion of church statistics, the House of Bishops and Council of General Synod were asked to consider some "green shoots" in the church. In that spirit, the *Anglican Journal* spoke to five thriving churches, some of which were even facing closure before managing to turn things around.

THE PHILOSOPHER



Churches may shrink but will survive in our secular age: Taylor

Why are so many congregations in Western countries shrinking? In an exclusive interview, the *Anglican Journal* spoke with Charles Taylor, one of Canada's most recognizable philosophers, on what the future might hold for established churches—and why people are drawn to faith in the first place.

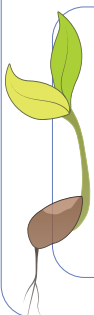
I'LL BE THERE



20-40 on 2040: Young Anglican thinkers on the church's future

While the church faces significant questions about its future, there are young Anglicans who plan on seeing that future, whatever its shape. The *Anglican Journal* asked some of the church's younger theological thinkers to share their reflections on church decline and what they anticipate ahead.

PM# 40069670



CoGS roundup: Decrease in contributions prompts vote on 2021 contingency provision

By Anglican Journal Staff

Diocesan contributions, which account for 87% of General Synod's net revenue, have decreased by around 20% over the past 25 years, Council of General Synod (CoGS) heard Nov. 9 during a budget presentation by General Synod treasurer Hanna Goschy. Following the presentation, CoGS voted to approve the 2020 budget and a contingency provision for the 2021 budget that would see \$250,000 made available from the church's Ministry Investment Fund to balance that year's budget, if required.

During General Synod in July, then-bishop of the diocese of Athabasca Fraser Lawton, a member of the financial management committee, reported that proportional gifts, the money forwarded by the dioceses to the national church every year, declined by \$519,000 in 2018. This drop represented the largest single-year decrease in proportional gifts the church had suffered since 1994, Lawton told General Synod at the time.

In her presentation to CoGS, Goschy noted that because proportional giving makes up such a large portion of General Synod revenue, "that's pretty critical, to understand where that's coming from and the direction that it's going."

Goschy also said that it was important for the council to "understand exactly where most of our revenue is coming from," and provided a chart detailing contributions from each diocese over a number of years. Goschy noted on a line graph how this giving has declined since 1995, with a much steeper decline beginning in 2017.

"In 1995, proportional giving was about \$9.4 million. It's \$7.6 million in the 2020 budget. So, that's a decrease of \$1.8 million over 25 years, or about 20%." Its level remained relatively stable at around \$8.4 million in the period of 2008 to 2017, Goschy added.

She noted that, as CoGS had heard the previous evening, Anglican church membership and attendance have declined sharply in recent years. "The decrease in proportional giving actually is not as steep as those statistics indicated, and mostly that's because there are fewer donors, but they are giving more," Goschy said, adding that "despite decreases in attendance of the church, proportional giving hasn't decreased as much. However, I think the story's going to change very soon."

Proportional giving is based on a target percentage of 26% of diocesan revenue, though not all dioceses commit to giving that figure. Annually, dioceses indicate their planned giving for the fiscal year around May. In the current fiscal year, Goschy told CoGS, a number of dioceses advised in September that they will not be able to meet their current commitment.

Goschy noted that the financial management committee is mandated to present a balanced budget. "It's been possible to do that for a couple of years now because we're monitoring expenses really carefully, and as staff positions become vacant through resignation or retirement, many of them have not been replaced. So up until the current time, there have been no program cuts or staff cuts due to decreases in proportional giving."

The 2020 budget totals \$7.6 million in proportional giving, including a \$240,000 contingency meant to cover a diocese



▲ **Anglican Council of Indigenous Peoples members lead the Council of General Synod in a hymn Friday, Nov. 8. (l-r): Judith Moses, Canon (lay) Donna Bomberry, Archbishop Mark MacDonald, Shilo Clark, Canon Murray Still, Canon Ginny Doctor.**

PHOTO: MATT GARDNER

that has not met its commitment in three consecutive previous years and a \$60,000 undesignated contingency. Goschy noted in her presentation that the total budgeted proportional gifting in 2020 is \$862,000 lower than the actual figures from 2016.

The motion to make an additional \$250,000 available from the Ministry Investment Fund, if required, to balance the 2021 budget was passed after an amendment from the floor reiterated that this would be a one-time measure.

"It is a one-time request given that proportional gifts have decreased quite substantially on very short notice for 2019, and forecast in the 2020 budget," said Goschy.

In total, CoGS approved four resolutions related to the budget: to approve the 2020 operating budget (with a surplus of \$34,934); to approve the 2020 capital budget (with expenditures of \$55,900); to approve four grants totalling \$250,000 for 2020 by the Ministry Investment Fund; and to make an additional \$250,000 available in order to ensure a balanced 2021 budget.

Primate hopes to make racial justice a focus for the church

In her first address as primate to CoGS, Archbishop Linda Nicholls, primate of the Anglican Church of Canada, said one of the tasks she wanted the church to focus on in coming years was fighting racism.

"I believe that it is at the heart of many areas of difficulty for us," she said. "It is certainly at the heart, in our country, of some of the challenges of our relationship with Indigenous peoples, for racism in its systemic forms is embedded in the laws and in the ways in which we have lived together," the primate told CoGS Nov. 7.

But the primate said she had also seen racism within the church.

"I've seen the pain amongst clergy of colour who are very clear when I ask them, 'Have you been a victim of racism in our church?' and every one of them nods."

She said she had seen clergy be turned down for positions in parishes for no other reason that she could see than "an unacknowledged and hidden stream of racism that lives in each of us."

She hoped, Nicholls said, the church would soon start work to deepen the commitment of the whole church to the *Charter for Racial Justice in the Anglican Church of Canada*.

The primate's remarks addressed a number of other topics, including the theme chosen for this triennium of CoGS by the General Synod's planning and agenda team.

"We fairly quickly settled on... 'A changing church. A searching world. A faithful God,'" she said. "For that theme sums up both the challenges and the possibilities that we will be encountering."

Next Sacred Circle planned for June 2020

The next gathering of Sacred Circle—a meeting of Indigenous Anglicans from across Canada—will be held June 14-19 in Orillia, Ont., CoGS heard Nov. 8.

Sacred Circle—the largest gathering of the Indigenous Anglican church—is normally held every three years. It met most recently in August 2018, so the next meeting will come a year earlier than usual. But organizers felt that after the passing of a number of resolutions at General Synod last July formalizing the creation of a self-determining Indigenous church within the Anglican Church of Canada, they wanted to move as quickly as possible on "putting some meat on the bones of what a self-determining Indigenous church will look like," Canon Murray Still, co-chair of the Anglican Council of Indigenous Peoples (ACIP), told CoGS.

The agenda, he said, will include topics such as finances and stewardship, with the short-term objective of setting up some benefits for currently non-stipendiary Indigenous Anglican clergy, he said.

Jubilee Commission presents early work on path to 'equitable funding base' for Indigenous church

The Jubilee Commission has started the work needed to propose a "just, sustainable and equitable funding base for the self-determining Indigenous Anglican church," CoGS heard Nov. 7.

Judith Moses, chair of the commission, told CoGS that the group had convened three video-based teleconferences, had developed a new logo and now had a website where information could be gathered.

Moses said the commission has been given a number of tasks, including examination of historic and current funds made available to Indigenous ministry; assessment of funds that are designated to Indigenous programming; and consideration of questions of property and divestment on financing the future of the Indigenous church.

"We were also given a list of suggested topics to look into it," she said. "For example, we have been asked to look at the salary levels of Indigenous clergy."

Moses summarized her comments by saying the group sees "a vibrant Indigenous church as really integral, central to the strategic goals of the larger church. This isn't about parallel churches. This isn't about overlapping activities. This is about Indigenous goals being at the core of who we are as a church." ■

“ [Racism] is certainly at the heart, in our country, of some of the challenges of our relationship with Indigenous peoples, for racism in its systemic forms is embedded in the laws and in the ways in which we have lived together.

—Archbishop Linda Nicholls, primate

Balancing institution and mission

Lessons from change in the Cuban church

In the wake of political change, “congregations collapsed; a handful of women and some men remained in each. But those who stayed did not permit the faith to be snuffed out, the doors to be closed, or the light of the gospel and the sacred teachings to be lost.”

Maria Griselda Delgado del Carpio
BISHOP OF THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH OF CUBA

TO MY BROTHERS and sisters in the Anglican Church of Canada:

The story of a church caught amidst worldly change is one familiar to Cuban Episcopalians. While the Canadian and Cuban contexts have many differences, Canadian Anglicans may have some interest in the experience of the Cuban church—an experience with which some will be very familiar. In the essay below, I humbly offer some details on how the Cuban church has faced change, as well as some reflections on the challenges Christians face across the globe, and a few observations based on my experience with Canadian Anglicans. I hope this offering is of some use to the Canadian church.

I begin by acknowledging that the Cuban church, like the Canadian church, is an historic church—a denomination whose origins and life, in the Cuban case, go back to the end of the 19th century. Thus, the church is an institution that has been and still is a bulwark—a church that attempts to guide a human group, however small, in the midst of a larger society.

From its inception, two dimensions of the church emerged: the church as an institution that signaled guidelines and norms, and, on the other hand, the missional, sacramental and living church.

The missional quality of the church can be seen at the beginning—history tells us of the young priest Edward Kenny, Bishop Henry Whipple from Minnesota, and Canadian bishops arriving in Havana to do works of mission and of service among society’s most vulnerable and fragile groups at the end of the 19th century. That century had not ended when Cubans familiar with the Episcopal Church in the United States—some of them already ordained—returned to Cuba and began a vigorously patriotic, pastoral effort in the midst of a society oppressed by the Spanish government. These priests founded congregations and social works, always for the benefit of the most economically, racially and socially vulnerable groups. This incarnate faith among the people has been and remains an important quality of the church.

In the beginning of the 20th century, the institution emerges: the first bishop is consecrated, the first cathedral is built and solid bases are laid for the institutional life of the church. This permitted the consolidation of congregations, formation of clergy and education through local schools. Ministries characterized by service were born.

Throughout the last century, these



PHOTO: ASHER IMTIAZ/THE LIVING CHURCH

“With God’s guidance, everything we are called to do—to fulfill, to dream, to serve, to examine error, to transform, to love—gains meaning, consummation, joy and light.”

two dimensions of the church worked together—not always in balance—and a large part of this history was owed to the surrounding social and political factors. What we can affirm is that in their hearts, Episcopalians always strove to serve others through the faith that inspired them.

The sociopolitical disruptions that followed the Cuban Revolution—and the configuration of an atheistic state in public education—must be recognized as the beginning of a critical challenge to Episcopalians in Cuba. Congregations collapsed; a handful of women and some men remained in each. But those who stayed did not permit the faith to be snuffed out, the doors to be closed, or the light of the gospel and the sacred teachings to be lost. Rather, these people remained firm and loyal to the cause of Christ. The very deep loyalty of that generation is one of the roots that nourished a new generation of Christians, even to this day.

In these years the church (institutional and missional) lived underground, invisible to the eyes of society. If lay leaders and clergy, with their small congregations, had closed their doors and abandoned the church, today we would not be sharing this story—or sharing the Good News—let alone cultivating hope in the midst of the unending challenges of our present. Today, our missional and sacramental identity tasks us with expressing a lively faith in Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour. This missional dimension gives meaning to the church as an institution.

In this past decade, and within this frame of reference, the Cuban church has gained new perspectives. A revival began to happen through renewed focus on leadership. The diocesan bishop, in her responsibility of guiding the diocese, centred her attention on building an inspiring movement around the person and life of Jesus of Nazareth, with a clear dimension of outward service. We recognize this central axis: the sacraments which give us new life and mission come from God, who guides us toward the construction of his kingdom and his justice. With God’s guidance, everything we are called to do—to fulfill, to dream, to serve, to examine error, to transform, to love—gains meaning, consummation, joy and light.

In 2011, the people of the church came together in a great collective project: women

and men, lay and clergy, youth and adults put all their ideas, reflections, doubts, hopes and goals on the table. From there we began to organize our missional route within the Great Commission, which Jesus Christ frames when he says “Go, make disciples, baptize them and teach them.”

Some questions arose in this process as we asked, for example: How might we carry out this commission concretely in our time and context? How had this been done previously, what worked and what must change? What are our challenges, necessities and goals?

This communal project, which set out a vision and mission for our church for three years, turned out to be difficult and complex. Many came with little disposition for change. But we didn’t lose courage. The three-year plans that followed were made more comprehensible to all, welcoming greater participation of individual congregations. We recognize that there is still a lot to do, all with the goal of drawing our mission together. We are currently working toward our fourth three-year period.

The project’s initial call to all the diocese was to build a diocesan family, what we call a “community-family.” This would have to be our frame of reference from which common good could arise for one and all—and from which we could share that goodness with those joining this family. Each person, respective to his or her background and gifts, would have to realize with greater clarity our shared call to a single vocation, to a sure faith—definitively toward following Jesus Christ, our God and Lord!

Nourished by the letter of St. Paul to the Ephesians (2:17-22), we want to carry out the promises of the gospel in today’s Cuban dynamics. But this isn’t the work of a day or a year. It requires time, energy, generosity, simplicity of heart, patience and mutual understanding. It is an effort in which all of our community-family must be involved, walking side-by-side—and with clear assurance that both direction and guidelines, which permit us to be united and advance toward the horizon, do in fact exist.

But what, in such times as these, should our guidelines look like? And to what horizon do we look?

In my view, old guidelines of being

See ‘SALT AND LIGHT’, p. 9



This far by faith

The way we talk about church decline may shape its future—and our belief

By Matthew Townsend
EDITOR

AS EDITORIAL SUPERVISOR of the *Anglican Journal*, there's little I can add to our overall discussion of the state of the church: the newly released statistics, the decline, the questions that loom. And, really, it's not my job.

My job, as I understand it, is to help the church understand itself and its narratives: to present the facts—even when they're uncomfortable—and to bring voices and views from around the church to our readership. The *Journal's* staff has spent months planning this January issue, pondering how to help Anglicans wrap their minds and spirits around the church's present situation, crucial for considering the tasks that lie ahead.

What I can offer of value, I think, is a brief commentary on the church's stories of decline and change. I've worked in various arms of Canadian and U.S. churches for around a dozen years, and in that time I've observed two ways of talking about church decline that, I think, deserve some consideration.

The first category of conversation centres around the overall decline of Christendom—secularization, the rise of other faiths, the emergence of those who are “spiritual but not religious,” and other sundry factors for the recession of the Christian church into the annals of history. There's nothing I can say to dispute these facts, and nor would I argue that the de-institutionalization of the church—the conversion of the church from an instrument of powers and principalities into an impoverished collection of spiritually desperate people like me who are keen on weak percolated coffee and a soundtrack set by Herbert Howells—is bad for the church or the faithful. As General Secretary Michael Thompson recently suggested at a meeting of the Council of General Synod, a church with smaller confirmation classes and larger heart for the poor, the mourners, the meek and those starving for righteousness isn't a church that's worse for the wear. And from where I stand, a church that actively trains clergy and parishioners about sexual misconduct is better than one that sweeps abuse under the carpet. A church that seeks reconciliation with the peoples it tried to



▲ **“The problem with placing too much emphasis on our actions and too little on God's will is, I think, that it exposes us to the promises of false prophets: those who offer us a ‘solution’ to the church's decline, wrapped up with a bow.”**

PHOTO: JORISVO/
SHUTTERSTOCKV

culturally annihilate is better than the one that scooped up children and took them to far-away places, sometimes never to return. Thank God we are this new church. Many horrors are in our rear-view mirror—but, as always, they are closer to us than they appear. The church's transformation is recent, fragile and ongoing.

This transformation doesn't mean the end of the church, and it doesn't mean the world is going to bring us down. I have travelled parts of the world in which the church will never return to the halls of power—but where the dedicated, however few, engage in the work of the church: lighting the candles, saying the prayers, breaking the bread and testifying to the ways in which our God is a God of great wonders and innumerable mercies.

The second category isn't so much a kind of narrative as a way of speaking: the future tense. “The church is going to experience an incredible decline.” “We will have to make tough decisions.” “The church will change.”

Often, these imaginings of the “future” are grouped with conditional statements—conditions we must meet. “If we don't do something, then churches will have to close.”

I caution us all on these kinds of statements for a few reasons. First, the church's decline is well-rooted in the past and is deeply present among us. It isn't just something that is going to happen; it has already happened. In addition, speaking of decline only as a future eventuality discounts the positive changes we have earned from the church's being

deposed, as outlined above.

Perhaps more concerning to me is the use of the conditional. Yes, everyone in the Anglican Church of Canada, from the farthest-flung pew to the office of the primate, will need to take action related to the church's decline. (Arguably, nearly all Anglicans are already engaged in facing decline—average donations have risen faster than inflation within the church for a long time.) The problem with placing too much emphasis on our actions and too little on God's will is, I think, that it exposes us to the promises of false prophets: those who offer us a “solution” to the church's decline, wrapped up with a bow.

For example, some might argue that the church has failed to attract people because it has clung to that pesky, made-up God thing. Instead, it's social justice and community that people need. I do believe these are real, true needs—but I also believe we still need God.

You might recall that time in the church when Moses was running slightly late from an appointment with God, and the Israelites decided it was time to take matters into their own hands. “Come, make gods for us, who shall go before us,” the Israelites implored Aaron (Exodus 32:1). We're all tempted to build golden calves, especially when we're desperate and the future seems uncertain. But as Albert Goodson wrote, we have come this far by faith, leaning on the Lord—trusting in God's holy word. I have seen with my own eyes the unshakeable faith of people facing circumstances far graver than the church's drop in membership, and I have seen God answer their prayers with abundant loving-kindness. Surely, we can apply the same standard to the church—and reject the notion that we should abandon our faith, abandon our principles or abandon our God. God has never abandoned us.

A final note on narratives: we sometimes hear talk of the early Christian church—the first centuries of the church's life, before it became bamboozled and corrupted by power. Doubtless, this period can teach us much; my concern centres around a way of talking about the church that puts us toward the end of a story, among the closing chapters.

Dear friends in Christ, what if we are the early Christian church, with the lives of countless saints to be born after us? The church of those saints, whatever its shape, may be difficult for us to imagine. But we do know one thing: Every time two or three are gathered in the name of Jesus Christ, the true king, the church lives. Everything else is just statistics. ■

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SINGING WITH JOY ▶



Keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus

By Linda Nicholls

IN THE FALL, the Council of General Synod and the House of Bishops heard the Rev. Neil Elliot's statistical report. The stark decline seen in that report was sobering but hardly a surprise to anyone in the church. We know that we have fewer people in the pews, aging congregations, fewer young people and church buildings that are closing. There is a profound sense of grief for many people at the changes and losses in the church in their lifetime.

It would be easy to despair! However, the numbers are simply a description—a snapshot in time of the life of the church and a possible future—if nothing changes. They are a mirror of our condition and a wake-up call if we are listening.

The statistics, however, do not tell the whole story. Our primary purpose is not to fill the pews of every church. Our call is to tell the Good News in word and action and invite others to join us in the adventure of faith in the God of all creation. Our call is to live the Five Marks of Mission daily in our generation. The statistics are the mirror that tells us that others do not see



▲ **“As we celebrate the revelation of Jesus to magi, prophets and fishermen we are called to see Jesus afresh and ask how we will point the way to him for those who have not met him.”**

IMAGE: SOLOMNIKOV

or hear in us good news for their lives. They do not believe we are a community of hope for what they face daily. The church has become irrelevant to many. There are many possible causes for that shift in trust in the church, and we could be distracted by a desire to understand them all first. However, we who follow Jesus know the power of the gospel to offer hope and give meaning and joy in our lives as we live the way of our Creator. That is our starting place.

Through most of the years of my ministry I have experienced this rapid decline in numbers. It has been deeply discouraging, leading to painful self-examination and fear for the future. It was at times paralyzing, as no program to fix the decline could be found. Over these years I came to realize that I needed to reframe the whole situation. There is no simple or single “fix.” We are simply challenged to set out on a journey with God to explore sharing the faith in the new ways. Like the Israelites in the exodus, we are being sent out not knowing our destination. We are being sent out of the

comfort and plenty we once knew into discovering a new resiliency.

We will need to be willing to take risks and wrong turns. We will need to be flexible and responsive. We will need perseverance and patience. We will need to look with new, open eyes at our world, to be curious about its needs and be neighbours to all. Our temptation will be to succumb to fear or retreat and resist any changes. Our challenge will be increasing our capacity to both be and tell good news, in the particular communities in which we have been placed, in ways that may be heard and that are filled with the hope and courage of the gospel.

At the heart of all we do to face the challenge, we will need to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith. As we celebrate the revelation of Jesus to magi, we are called—like prophets and fishermen before us—to see Jesus afresh and ask how we will point the way to him for those who have not met him. That is our most important challenge! ■

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

WALKING TOGETHER ▶



The challenges and opportunities before us

By Mark MacDonald

IT IS VERY clear that the future for our church is challenging. But it is very important that we accurately identify what the challenge actually is. In many minds, institutional survival is our challenge. This is a dangerous idea, as survival, as a goal, tends to generate a morality and procedure ensuring death. A community's core values and ideals are lost. When that happens, survival is impossible. The task is presented as the management of decline. The real task is the rediscovery of hope.

I see four major components to our present challenge: 1) the authority of the church in the wider society is all but gone, as the era of Christendom ends—this is an identity crisis; 2) critically, we have been deeply influenced (I would say, subverted) by the values, habits and desires of this present age—this is a crisis of commitment; 3) the ethnocultural group that dominated our church has been decimated by low

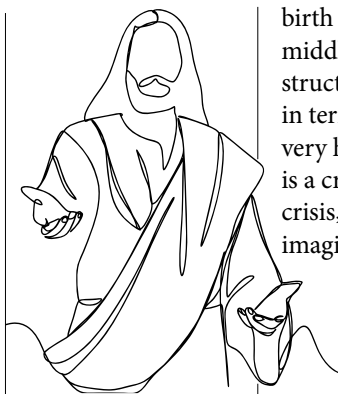


IMAGE: DODOMO/SHUTTERSTOCK

birth rates and the diminishment of the middle class—this is a people crisis; 4) the structures that we developed to be church, in terms of building, staff and program, are very hard to sustain, economically—this is a crisis that presents itself as a resource crisis, when its true nature is a crisis of imagination and faith.

Because of our enchantment by the mirage of efficiency and competence that the businesses of our broader culture present, the response to our challenge can appear to be found in effective administration and planning. Though these techniques are helpful tools, overreliance on them can hide many of the real dimensions of a positive future.

Our first turn is to the heart of our faith, Jesus. His presence and identity are the heartbeat, power and glory of our gatherings. There is no step forward that does not focus on Jesus. It is here that we find our identity.

Our second turn is away from the

gods of this age to God, the Ruler of the Universe. This is the rediscovery of a discipleship, so much more important and consequential than the most efficient of administrative regimes.

Our third turn is to the peoples of our wider society, especially the poor and the marginalized. Churches that find room for the other usually find, at the very least, vitality and, quite often, growth. Our horizon can never be limited to finding people like ourselves.

Our fourth turn is to imagine a form of Eucharistic community that is replicable, sustainable and transformational. By making our core values and commitments living and real in the life of our community, we will become a church that the poor can afford and a people whose glory is Jesus. ■

Archbishop Mark MacDonald is national Indigenous archbishop of the Anglican Church of Canada.

LETTERS ▶

The Anglican Journal welcomes letters to the editor.

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



December 2013 issue of the Anglican Journal

Cherry-picking God's advice

In the December 2013 edition of the *Anglican Journal*, a front-page profile titled “The irreverent, reverent Don Cherry” prompted me to write a letter to the editor, which was subsequently published in February 2014. In it, I decried the paper's decision to give credence to a man who regularly offends multiple groups of our population and is given a pass because he attends a parish in Mississauga and can, among other things, recite passages from the *Book of Common Prayer*. In the article, Cherry says he turns to God for all his important decisions. I shook my head at some of the advice his God has given him.

Now, six years after that article was published—years during which Cherry continued to glibly besmirch numerous individuals and groups and to which viewers, Anglicans included, shrugged their collective shoulders and said, “That's just Grapes, get over it”—he has finally been called out and his platform ripped out from under him.

I, for one, look forward to enjoying *Hockey Night in Canada* without this shock jock raising my blood pressure.

Judith Butler
Toronto

As a role model, Cherry is the pits

Some time ago, there was a fawning appreciation of Don Cherry as an Anglican published in the *Journal*.

He never was a good role model in his starched collar and off-putting manner, but this last round is enough.

Could I request that he no longer be held up as a “moral example?” In his public persona, he goes against everything that the church claims to value.

He may “play well” with a subset of Anglicans, but he is more likely to drive people away from the church than he is to attract them, now that times have changed.

John Whitmore
Hillsborough, N.B.



'We could get stuck in the weeds looking for the causes, because everybody likes to think if we knew the causes, we could fix it. The reality is that there are multiple and complex causes...'

—Archbishop Linda Nicholls,
primate

Statistics serve as mirror for church: Nicholls

Continued from p. 1

The data were gathered in 2018 from the dioceses by the Rev. Neil Elliot, a priest in the diocese of Kootenay with a PhD in sociology seconded as part-time statistician by the national church. Elliot presented them in reports to the House of Bishops and Council of General Synod (CoGS) this fall.

The data consist of statistics in a range of areas, including number of clergy and other employees; church membership and attendance, as measured in several ways; and performance of the pastoral offices of baptism, confirmation, marriage and funerals. The data are, according to Elliot's report, the first "complete and mostly reliable" set of statistics collected by the church since around 2001.

The data show the church running out of members in little more than two decades if it continues to decline at its current rate, Elliot said in a Nov. 8 presentation to CoGS.

"We've got simple projections from our data that suggest that there will be no members, attenders or givers in the Anglican Church of Canada by approximately 2040," he said.

The projection should be taken especially seriously by Canadian Anglicans, Elliot said, because it is suggested by five different sets of church data, all collected in different ways: older data from 1961 to 2001; *Anglican Journal* subscriber data from 1991 to 2015; and three sets of data from his own survey of the dioceses as of 2017: the number of people on parish rolls, average Sunday attendance and regular identifiable givers.

"For five different methodologies to give the same result is a very, very powerful statistical confirmation which we really, really have to take seriously and we can't dismiss lightly," said Elliot.

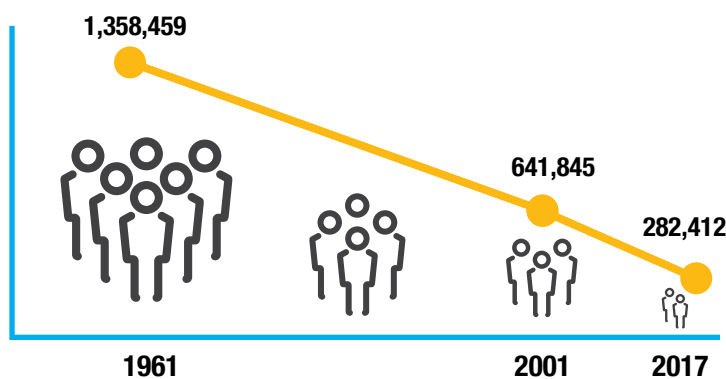
Two other findings, he added, suggest different outcomes. Data collection on the pastoral offices of baptism, confirmation, marriage and funerals show an even faster rate of decline. However, a demographic study of a small number of parishes in the diocese of Kootenay, he said, suggested that—because of the age ranges that Anglicans fall into—the church could lose only 50% of its members by 2040.

But Nicholls said she believes Anglicans should be careful about jumping to conclusions about what will happen to the church in the future based purely on statistics of past decline. Clearly, she said, there are Anglicans today who still intend to be going to church in 2040, and the church will not close by that date.

"We all know that it's not actually going to happen, because not everybody's going to disappear," she said. Elliot made a similar statement in his report to the House of Bishops.

Nicholls said she believed the true value of statistics-gathering lies not in prediction, but in holding a mirror up to the church.

Anglican members on parish rolls from 1961 to 2017



▲ **Statistics show a relatively linear decline in the church since 1961, the Rev. Neil Elliot says.**

CHART: SASKIA ROWLEY

"It is valuable in telling us what is," she said. "And sometimes we're slow to recognize what is, because it's not what we want it to be. We look through rose-coloured glasses sometimes."

One thing that needs to be recognized, she said, is the role of grief caused by the church's decline in membership over the decades and the necessity of church closures that has come with it.

"I've had this said [to me] in small parishes that are clearly dying—people say, 'No, no, no, I just want it to hang on until I'm buried from it.' And that's a tremendous sadness, because you understand the deep pain there is for people who've lived in that community their whole life.... They intuitively know that this isn't going to continue forever but just hang on 'til I get to the end.' So there's a lot of pain in this, a lot of pain, and grief and loss."

A reluctance to face this loss, Nicholls said, sometimes results in parishes avoiding taking action.

"One of the responses to grief can be denial. Because denial means then that 'I don't have to change anything, I can just pretend that this didn't happen, it's not happening and I don't have to take personal responsibility for what might need to be done differently.'

"It comes out in parishes clinging to patterns of the way they do things that are not necessarily helpful any longer."

In fact, however, the current situation is calling for initiative from everyone—not just church leaders, she said. "It's asking of us a lot more creativity, at every level of the church, and a lot less waiting for somebody else to fix it—the creativity needs to come right from the grassroots, from people in the pews."

Nicholls said she also hoped concerned Anglicans would focus on trying to discern the will of God for the church rather than the causes of the church's decline in membership.

"We could get stuck in the weeds looking for the causes, because everybody likes to think if we knew the causes, we could fix it. The reality is that there are multiple

and complex causes—some of which may belong to us, but a lot is also part of the general *zeitgeist* [spirit of the time] around us, in terms of philosophy, in terms of social conditions, in terms of people's mistrust of institutions generally," she said. "These are all factors—there's no one factor that you can look at and say, 'Gee, if we could fix that, we could fix everything.' And there isn't a quick fix."

What the church needs to be asking now, in every community in which it finds itself, she said, is "Where do we see Jesus at work here, and how can we be part of that? And how can we be, frankly, open and generous in our expression of the Good News?"

There will be no one-size-fits-all answer to this, she added, because it will always depend on the context.

"It's rooted in the communities in which our parishes...live, and their needs and concerns," Nicholls said.

The church also needs to know better where it is growing—and that's one area where detailed, continued statistics-taking can help, she said. "It is important that we collect them, and I hope we can encourage dioceses and parishes to do that to help us all."

Elliot's data suggest that the church's rate of decline has been roughly consistent since 1961—a situation likely to feel worse, for those involved in it, than it may sound. A consistent rate of decline means that, although roughly the same *number* of people leave every year, a greater *proportion* leaves every year, and as time goes by it takes less time for the same proportion of people to leave. Think of it this way: if a church that starts at 100 people loses 10 each year, that first year won't feel so bad. Ninety people in the pews feels a lot like 100, and the church will operate much as before. But each year brings greater concentrations of responsibility and loss—especially as the congregation reduces to 30, 20, and finally 10.

This phenomenon bears out in the statistics. By the number of Anglicans on parish rolls, membership declined by 50%—from 1,358,459 to 641,845—in the 40 years between 1961 and 2001. But it declined by almost the same proportion—44%—in the mere 16 years between 2001 and 2017.

All of this decline, Elliot's report notes, occurred during a time when the overall population of Canada was growing. As a result, Anglican church members have come to make up an ever-smaller sliver of the Canadian population: 7% in 1961, 2% in 2001, and just 1% in 2017. Think about our example church—shrunk to 10 members—and now imagine it in downtown Toronto, surrounded by new high-rise condominiums.

In a response to a question at CoGS on how other Canadian churches were faring, Elliot said data collected by the United



'I remain hopeful, and I absolutely, absolutely reject the thought that we're gone in 2040.... I know the lay people and the clergy that I work with are still deeply passionate and deeply committed to their faith and their church, and that gives me reason to be hopeful.'

—Geoff Peddle,
bishop of the diocese of
Eastern Newfoundland and Labrador

Church of Canada also showed 2040 as a “zero-member date.” The Presbyterian Church in Canada, while declining, seems to be losing members somewhat more slowly, he said. For the U.S.-based Episcopal Church, he added, the projected zero-member date was around 2050.

Archdeacon Michael Thompson, general secretary of General Synod, told CoGS that senior staff of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada had given him a similar impression about membership decline in that church.

“Though I can’t quote the numbers, the lines look quite similar,” he said.

At the time this article was written, official publication of the statistics on *anglican.ca* was slated for late December. However, a version of Elliot’s report had been leaked before his presentation to CoGS. In October, a link to it appeared in the *Anglican Samizdat* independent blog, after which it began to spread through social media. On Nov 4., *Broadview*, the former *United Church Observer*, published a story on the report.

In her opening remarks to CoGS, and again after Elliot’s presentation, Nicholls assured members it had not been the intention of church leaders that they should hear about the statistics before they were presented to CoGS. She also noted the report had generated little interest outside the church after it was leaked.

Nicholls said she hoped that instead of trying to figure out why the church was in numerical decline, or get drawn into a “vortex of negativity” about it, Canadian Anglicans would instead focus on the church’s calling.

“I think we’re being tested about perseverance, endurance, creativity in the coming years,” she said. “At the end of the day, when we stand before the great judgement seat and have to answer for how we lived our lives as Christians, I think the question that will be asked is, ‘Were you faithful with what you were given?’”

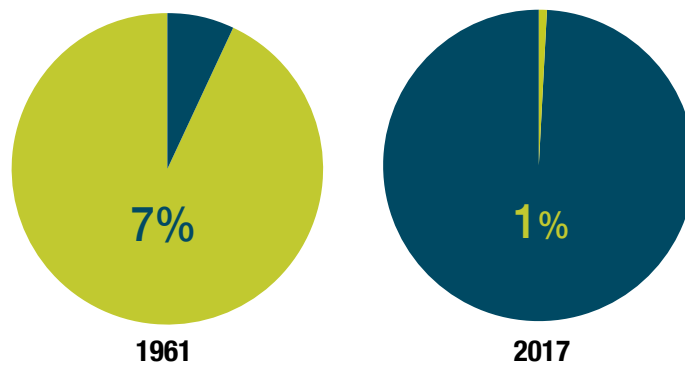
Nicholls also said she was hopeful to see “green shoots” of growth in various areas around the country—some in the church’s traditional ways of being and some in its new ways of expressing itself.

The primate is not alone in cautioning Canadian Anglicans not to conclude from the past rate of decline that there will be no Anglicans left in the country by 2040. Geoff Peddle, bishop of the diocese of Eastern Newfoundland and Labrador, examined membership trends in the Anglican church in Newfoundland, and the possible reasons for them, in a 2011 PhD dissertation. He says he has no doubt there will still be an Anglican church in Canada in two decades.

“I remain hopeful, and I absolutely, absolutely reject the thought that we’re gone in 2040,” Peddle says. “I know the lay people and the clergy that I work with are still deeply passionate and deeply committed to their faith and their church, and that gives me reason to be hopeful.”

The great complexity of the factors

Percentage of Anglicans in the Canadian population



▲ **The church’s membership has shrunk—as Canada’s overall population has grown. This means Anglicans make up a smaller proportion of the population.**

CHART: SASKIA ROWLEY

involved makes it extremely difficult to predict the church’s future membership, he says.

“I don’t think we can necessarily predict what’s going to happen over the next 20 or 40 years any better than we could predict in the ’60s what was going to happen,” he says.

Peddle says the statistics that the church has made it a practice to gather thus far, such as average Sunday attendance and the number of people on parish rolls, leave out “amazing things that happen between Sundays,” and many people—those helped by its ministry, or those who volunteer for it and partner with it—who are part of the church’s life.

“I think we are having profound, life-giving conversations today across the church, with all kinds of partners.”

Some people have returned to the church in his diocese, he says, after its synod agreed to allow same-sex marriages in September.

Peddle says he believes the church’s membership in Newfoundland—hit particularly hard in the ’90s by outmigration from the province—is now leveling off. In his diocese, the number of confirmations jumped from 180 in 2017 to 328 in 2018.

In a sermon at CoGs on Nov. 9, National Indigenous Anglican Archbishop Mark MacDonald said, with reference to the church’s falling membership, that its task should be not to manage decline, but to rediscover hope. In an interview with the *Journal*, MacDonald said he also believed that part of the church’s numerical decline was due to its focus in the past on a now-shrinking segment of Canadian society—middle- and upper-middle class people of British background.

“We have been very focused on a particular ethnic and socio-economic constituency,” he said. “That constituency is in decline, and we, because we have been so much involved with that constituency alone, are in decline as well.”

It’s time for the church to look outside this demographic, he said.

“There are other Canadians as well who I assume would be happy to be a part of our group, and so for me, the decline means that

we need to look beyond our boundaries,” MacDonald said. “I don’t think decline in and of itself is bad. I think there are many ways to be faithful to God that don’t necessarily involve growing. But I do think that we need to have a larger horizon.”

Asked how the church is doing among Indigenous Canadians, MacDonald said that while church attendance is not doing well, confirmations and baptisms are “booming.”

The statistics show membership falling across the country from 2001 to 2017, at least as measured by one key indicator: average Sunday attendance. At least one diocese seems to have bucked the trend, however. Elliot’s data show that average Sunday attendance in the diocese of the Arctic increased by 264% from 2001 to 2017.

David Parsons, bishop of the diocese of the Arctic, said he’s seen some growth in membership in the church. In some communities in the diocese, he says, the problem is not that not enough people are going to church, but that existing churches can’t hold everyone who shows up.

There are likely a number of causes for the increase in membership, he says. One of these is the relatively fast rate of population growth in the north. Another, he says, is the uniquely spiritual culture of the north’s Indigenous people.

“Most Indigenous people are very much aware of the spiritual world—many others have been taught to just rely upon their intellect and their emotions,” he says. “That’s not enough—we’re spiritual beings.”

With this, he says, comes a different attitude toward the church in the north—and in many Arctic communities, the Anglican church is the only church.

“In the Arctic, everybody looks to the church, even if they’re not attending. If you have a town of say 400 people, all of them may not be going to church, but all of them will be looking to the church, and they see the value of the church being there,” he says. “That may not be the case in the south.”

The Arctic church could also be attracting more people because its intense trust in Scripture as a source of meaning that gives people the hope they need, he says.

“We’re Bible-believing Christians,” he says. “The basic questions of human beings around the world—Who am I? Where did I come from? What’s my purpose? Why am I here?—the Bible answers those questions.... The church has a message of hope.”

Parsons says he also believes the church is called to grow in numbers, citing the parable of the talents, in which a master praises two of his servants for investing the money entrusted to them at a profit.

Introducing Elliot’s presentation to CoGS, Thompson said he believed Canadian Anglicans should look at the numerical decline of their church’s membership in the context of other changes for the better.

The London, Ont., church in which he
See GROUP OF BISHOPS, p. 8

Statistician sees ParishOS as future of church's data collection

Tali Folkins
STAFF WRITER

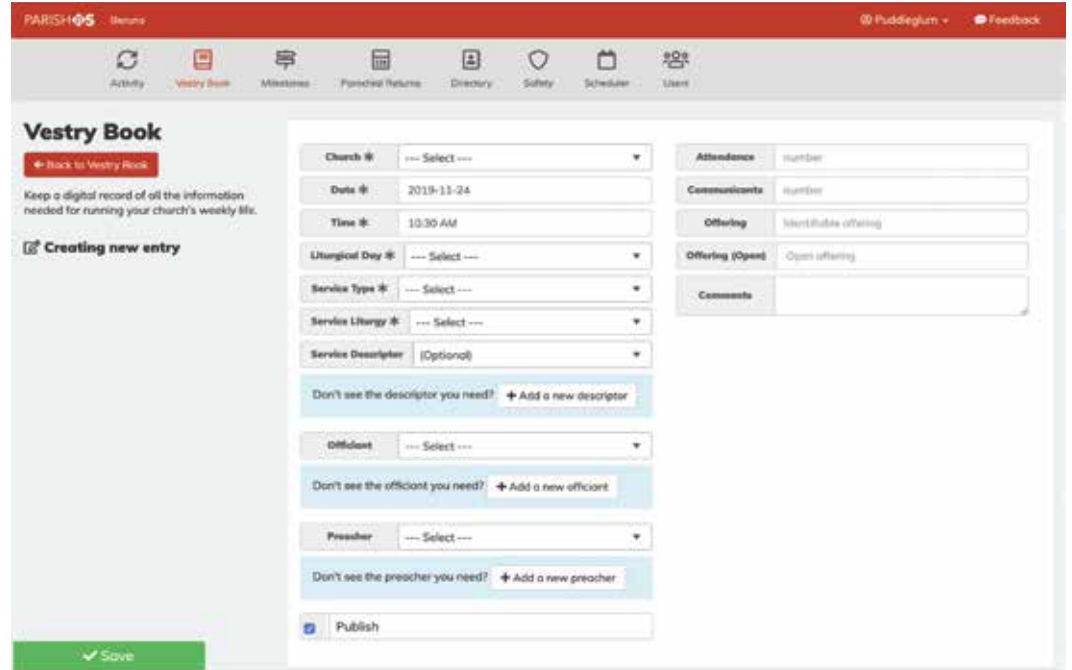
The Anglican Church of Canada's statistician says he hopes a new electronic tool for gathering parish data will allow the church to see itself with greater clarity.

ParishOS is an application developed for the church by Luke Johnson, a Canadian Anglican web developer, on the basis of work by the Rev. Brian Ford of St. John's Cathedral in Winnipeg and with suggestions from the Rev. Neil Elliot. Essentially, it's an electronic vestry book. Since 2016, ParishOS has been adopted by three dioceses, and interest in it is growing, Elliot says.

One advantage of ParishOS, Elliot says, is that putting data into electronic form allows users to easily see trends, which the software can represent graphically.

"If your parish data is stuck in a book, you can't do anything with it," he says. "You need it to be in electronic format first of all, so that you can then start to look at it and it can start to tell you things about what's going on in your parish that you may or may not have noticed."

The software can identify all sorts of patterns, he says—for example, whether a congregation is growing or declining and at what rate, and how that rate compares to other parishes in the diocese; how levels of participation in Messy Church or other types of service have been doing



▲ A vestry book entry in ParishOS web app at codigo.ca/work/parishos

PHOTO: CODIGO.CA

compared to others; and whether there are seasonal fluctuations in attendance. It can also function as a ministry scheduler, helping church leaders organize volunteer participation and other aspects of church life.

ParishOS could also greatly help dioceses, Elliot says, because the data will be fed directly to them, so that they don't have to manually process information from the forms that come to them from parishes.

Elliot says he understands that a working group of bishops, which formed this fall to look into data collection, may

propose gathering new kinds of data. But ParishOS, he says, already holds the potential for understanding church data in new ways, by identifying trends that have so far gone unnoticed.

"We might...find new ways of looking at existing data, because existing data might be able to tell us things that we're not asking it to tell us at the moment," he says.

ParishOS is being offered to the dioceses for free by the national church. Parishes interested in accessing it should contact the executive officers of their dioceses, Elliot says. ■

Group of bishops to explore numbers 'we should be counting'

Continued from p. 7

started worshipping in 1968, Thompson said, "while not filled to the point of discomfort, was full." On the other hand, he added, "in all of the years that I attended that church...in all of the years I had attended church before then, and in all of the years that I attended church until I was in my 20s, I never once heard a sermon that made reference to God's justice."

He continued, "I never once heard anybody tell me about the residential schools. I never heard anything about the responsibility of the people of God to respect the dignity of every human being. It's not that people didn't care about those things, but those things were not tip-of-the-tongue discourse in the life of the church in which I was formed. Things are quite different now."

Elliot also told the group about ongoing efforts to expand and diversify data collection using a new computer application, ParishOS [see sidebar]. He said he hoped the church would be better able to monitor how specific aspects of its life, some of which may hold particular potential—home churches, Fresh Expressions, Messy Church and *Book of Common Prayer* services, for example—are doing.

Meanwhile, a working group of bishops, to be headed by Mary Irwin-Gibson, bishop of the diocese of Montreal, has been formed, Thompson said, "to say what are the things we should be counting... that will help us understand that, while the church we offer to God is smaller than it has been in the past, that's not the only



'I never once heard anybody tell me about the residential schools. I never heard anything about the responsibility of the people of God to respect the dignity of every human being. It's not that people didn't care about those things, but those things were not tip-of-the-tongue discourse in the life of the church in which I was formed. Things are quite different now.'

—Archdeacon Michael Thompson, general secretary

thing that's true of it?"

In table group discussions after Elliot's presentation, members of CoGS were asked to ponder four questions: whether the data was true to their own experience; what surprised or stood out for them in the report; what they believed God was telling the church through the data; and where the Good News was in it.

Some table spokespeople said the data matched the experience of those at their table; some reported that at least one member of their group came from a growing or stable parish. Some groups expressed doubt that the church would run out of members by 2040.

"We actually don't think there's ever going to be a zero person," one table spokesperson said. "I think what we will be offering to God in 2040 will be a different church, and a much smaller church, but it will still be a church."

Another reported of his group, "Between the range of us there were some who found it hard to understand how everybody that they knew would either be dying or

becoming apostate at 55, for the church to run out of members." But he himself, the spokesperson added, was amazed to learn the church hadn't lost more than Elliot's report stated.

Some groups spoke to hope that the report would spur the church to change.

"Our group talked about the great hope, and good news, in the idea of taking more risks," one said. "We see good news in the fact that several of us were noticing that lots of newcomers to the congregation were new Canadians as well.... Now we're in this time of change, we can start addressing these kind of trends." And the emptying of rural congregations might mean more opportunities for ecumenical shared ministries, the spokesperson said.

Some groups were curious about whether data could be collected in other areas—such as how church buildings are being used. At least one group spoke to hope that the collection of the data, and possibly more data in the future, would not only help the church identify areas of growth; it would also help parishes and

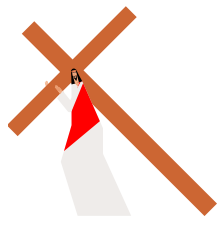
dioceses in numerical decline know that they're not alone.

Asked by the *Anglican Journal* how she thought Canadian Anglicans should pray for the church, Nicholls replied, "Pray for the Spirit to blow through the hearts and minds of everyone, and open our eyes to see where Jesus is calling us to be at work. It's not that God isn't there in the community already. And it isn't that God isn't calling us—sometimes we're just expecting God to be in a different place, and so we don't see God where God actually is."

"Pray for us to be flexible and open in how we express the gospel. And pray for that deepening of discipleship in us that will lead us there."

She added, "At the end of the day, if we have prayed with open hearts and minds to see where God is calling us to be and work, if we have sought to follow that to the best of our ability, that is all we can do.... I think we need to have courage and simply be faithful."

"God will have a church." ■



“Across the world, cultures—not only the Cuban one—are dominated by a secularization that proposes and promotes godless ways of life. This dilutes the gospel, and everything becomes relative: the Son of God, his life, his miracles, his promise of abundant life, his suffering and death and his resurrection, which overcomes death and gives life in full to each human being—all of this lacks meaning. Jesus has turned into nothing more than a good man, liberator, friend of the poor and an enemy of power.”

‘Salt and light’ strategy leads to church vitality

Continued from p. 3

church that no longer work are those which have tended to relativize and dilute the gospel of Jesus. A tendency has arisen, following decades of growing secularization and postmodernism, to “tune” the gospel message to the day’s fashions.

Whether this tuning has conformed to ideological overtones or lines of superficial thinking, it has given rise to a tremendous lack of values among young generations. Across the world, cultures—not only the Cuban one—are dominated by a secularization that proposes and promotes godless ways of life. This dilutes the gospel, and everything becomes relative: the Son of God, his life, his miracles, his promise of abundant life, his suffering and death and his resurrection, which overcomes death and gives life in full to each human being—all of this lacks meaning. Jesus has turned into nothing more than a good man, liberator, friend of the poor and an enemy of power.

This transformation threatens the very foundation of our being, starving us of the spiritual sustenance that every human being needs. Under such conditions, there’s nothing solid to cling to, no clear horizon to advance toward. This lack of faith has created loneliness, alienation and fragmentation. This dearth of prayer and gratitude creates selfishness and arrogance; only power, money and status have value, a value derived from crushing others. Since “life is short,” momentary pleasure is easily justified. Anything goes.

The creation of new guidelines would turn the church toward vision, effort, life and mission; toward our origins, toward Jesus—his gospel, his innate transformative power in each person, his Way toward accomplishing his kingdom. Such new guidelines would point to a person’s encounter with Jesus, in the midst of daily ups and downs, and the community’s encounter with Jesus—allowing communities to share and develop new life purposes in their surroundings.

New guidelines would also ask communities to discern a coherent and true testimony to the gospel—and to be able to offer their lives in loving service. Such a call requires ongoing and deep formation, allowing people to be disciples of Jesus—that is, living witnesses in all times and places.

In Cuba, such reflections have outlined a life-giving project, “Renewing Spaces,” in which both congregations and people with no connection to the church are involved. In its essence, “Renewing Spaces” attempted to renew, refresh, reinvent and remake lost or invisible spaces in people and communities. It allowed the renovation of mental spaces, spiritual spaces, spaces in the heart, physical spaces—and also renewal of fallow spaces in fields and gardens to plant food, to nourish and preserve the creation of God using new ecological systems. Above all, it aimed to renew the space for meeting with Jesus Christ and his gospel, and the possibilities for following his path.

The combination and interaction of certain factors has produced qualitative changes in the Episcopal Church of Cuba. Among them are the remodeling of the role of the church in its community; the formation of church leaders and a clear process toward pastoral vocations; the development of biblical-theological formation, together with training in community service projects; the involvement of clergy and lay people in the process of change, especially women

and youth; the race against time to rebuild all over the diocese—old buildings where the communities can celebrate and serve, as well as the creation and consecration of sacred buildings for new faith communities; and a greater opening to the opportunities for cooperation with other churches in our environs. To the last point, we have found partnerships with the Anglican Church of Canada, the Episcopal Church and groups like the Primate’s World Relief and Development Fund and Episcopal Relief & Development, along with the Commission of Theological Education for Latin America and the Caribbean and Trinity Wall Street.

In the face of many challenges, the Cuban church has found vibrance in a few places worth noting.

The vitality of the Cuban church in this last decade—in both institutional and missional dimensions—can be explained by an emphasis on its witness of being “salt and light” for its people. We began to combine aid with development from within church. Its people, grouped in congregations, aren’t seen as entities waiting for the help of external forces that will solve their problems—but as persons who, when properly formed, can change their spiritual, socioeconomic and environmental circumstances. In this framework, as we indicated earlier, evangelization and mission take on greater meaning for everyone. Communities of faith are filled with life, and their experience spreads.

In general, the Cuban church is also blessed by the historic roots of the Cuban people. Spirituality has been a key characteristic of the nationality for more than 500 years. This historic antecedent gave the Cuban nation a lively, creative, happy, tenacious and optimistic social fabric, thanks to which wars, political instability and scarcity could be faced—along with, in the last 60 years, the complexity derived from the construction of a different society. Cuban spirituality has always been an alternative to crises. And in the case of Episcopal identity, its vitality comes from our practice of faith that is incarnate in the day-to-day reality of the Cuban people.

In the 1960s, the church found itself trapped between the tensions of the Cold War. Because Cuba and the United States had broken all diplomatic links, no dialogue was possible. The Episcopal Church, then known as the Episcopal Church in the United States of America (ECUSA), lost communication with the Cuban church to an unexpected degree, which moved ECUSA’s House of Bishops to concede to the Cuban church autonomy without any process in place. The Cuban church ended up isolated abroad—and at home, in the middle of a difficult sociopolitical context that was hostile to religious expression.

Faced with these challenges, the generation that had to confront this situation accepted—in the midst of many limitations and on the basis of a great fidelity to God—a deep faith and a search for new ways to continue passing along the faith. Historians affirm that “they took into their hands the legacy and the living traditions, the glorious history, and they set themselves to creatively construct an autonomous church and to increase self-sufficiency little by little.”

Our vitality, of course, has also come from our relationships. In the six decades that followed that break in communication,

the Cuban church and its bishops had to confront much solitude and many limitations, needing to carry out mission with very few resources and little hope of finding solutions. The unconditional help of the Anglican Church of Canada, through its primates, was fundamental for the Cuban church throughout these years. Canadians offered spiritual and pastoral support through the constant presence of primates and their teams in the life and ministries of Cuban Episcopalians; support in matters of faith and order; and support with economic resources that sustained the work of the church across a wide spectrum of needs. The church and its leaders knew how to value these resources and advance every pastoral effort toward all corners of the diocese.

I have seen, in those companionships in mission, notable traits in our Canadian brothers and sisters: their own sources of vitality. Canadian Anglicans are a people of profound respect regarding other cultures, especially the Cuban-Caribbean idiosyncrasy, as well as their own multicultural society. They value the other person and wish to learn about their culture. They have minds open to accepting what is different. They clearly understand the meaning of colonialism and its consequences—from this vantage point, they relate to others, especially with the Cuban church. Their field of action is clearly focused on just causes. On the other hand, they have the sincerity to recognize their failings and to channel them without arrogance. They have an attentive ear and responsible manner, key to maintaining relations with others. And in their leaders we have observed a deep spirituality with which they advance both pastoral and missional work, inside their church and toward the Anglican Communion.

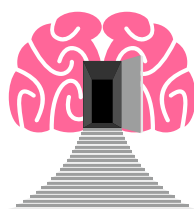
We have also recognized that this very vision of respect has distanced, perhaps, Canadian Anglicans from a livelier, more passionate faith. The shadow of secularism seems partly cast upon their lives and their spirituality. They may likewise struggle with a societal indifference to the faith, to the person of Jesus Christ and to his promises of transformation—owing, I respectfully believe, to a strong current of dominant secularism in Canada’s technology-driven society.

It is in the hands of each believer to work with his or her community, be it small or large, to strengthen their witness of the faith; to teach, to form and to share from a very early age, and especially to youth; to focus pastoral labour on the construction of a vast family of faith; to be constant in prayer; to not be afraid, pessimistic and uncaring, but active and passionate about sharing the message of love and service; to not dilute the gospel but to return to its origin—to be disciples and authentic followers of Jesus of Nazareth; to work with passion so as to discover the depth of life that the gospel offers to each person; and to see the horizon that opens ahead.

Canadian Anglicans have great possibilities of deepening faith in the lives of many, precisely because of the sense of loving service they offer to others with such solidarity. May the Spirit of God guide them and bless them always.

This is what I willingly share from my heart. ■

Translation: Iris Salcedo, Matthew Townsend



“Canadian Anglicans are a people of profound respect regarding other cultures, especially the Cuban-Caribbean idiosyncrasy, as well as their own multicultural society. They value the other person and wish to learn about their culture. They have minds open to accepting what is different.”

The changing face of church

Across the Anglican Church of Canada, buildings are closing and congregations merging, or even meeting in houses. What will Sunday morning look like in the years to come?

“The gold standard for me as a professor of evangelism is, in this age, are we baptizing adults? Are we offering a reaffirmation of faith to adults?”

—The Rev. Judy Paulsen, professor of evangelism at Wycliffe College, University of Toronto

Joelle Kidd
STAFF WRITER

On October 2, 2019, the congregants and friends of St. John the Evangelist Anglican Church in Fruitvale, B.C., took a last look at the building that had served them well over the years. They fell in line behind Lynne McNaughton, bishop of the diocese of Kootenay; dressed in her cope and mitre, crosier in hand, McNaughton led the procession out of the church, and into a motorhome that was waiting outside.

“It was the symbolism that we were on the move, and had a home worshipping,” says the Rev. Elizabeth Lewis, St. John’s deacon. “There’s a lovely picture of her sitting in the driver’s seat,” she adds.

The October service was a deconsecration of the building that had housed the church until July of this year, after the United Church of Canada congregation that co-owned the building decided to close their church and wanted to sell the property, Lewis says. Without full ownership of the building, St. John’s had to sell.

Since then, however, the congregation has continued to meet, first in public parks and gardens throughout the summer months, and now in one of four parishioners’ houses (the location rotates weekly).

Some say that house churches may become an increasingly common solution to the problems of aging buildings, rising costs and diminishing finances that many of today’s shrinking congregations face. In 2017, then-bishop of the diocese of Huron Linda Nicholls told the *Huron Church News* that “God may be calling us back to being house churches in some areas.”

Today, Archbishop Nicholls, from her vantage point as primate of the Anglican Church of Canada, still sees home churches as a viable alternative for congregations unable to maintain their buildings. “I think our preoccupation with buildings has been to our detriment,” she said in an interview with the *Anglican Journal*. “I’m not saying we don’t need buildings—absolutely, we need some, but do we need as many as we have?”

There is spiritual meaning in creating “beautiful spaces that are set apart and... filled with prayer,” she acknowledges. “You feel the prayer that’s been soaked into the walls of a cathedral or church that’s been there for a hundred years. That’s not to be discarded lightly, but it is to say, if it is getting in the way of the ministry and mission to which you are called, then we have to ask that question.”

Nicholls notes that the early church met in homes. “There’s no reason we couldn’t have people gathering in homes. We already do that for Bible study—nothing to say that we can’t do that in groups of 15 or 20 for worship... It’s one possibility.” The gospel “doesn’t say anything about buildings,” she says. “It just says... ‘whenever two or three are gathered.’”

From house to house

Since they began meeting in houses, Lewis says, church members seem happy. “We still have a community spirit, and we’re still known in the community here.”

The house church format has provided the opportunity to expand the way they worship.



▲ When Bishop Lynne McNaughton deconsecrated St. John the Evangelist Anglican Church in Fruitvale, B.C., she led a procession of parishioners to a motorhome. “It was the symbolism that we were on the move, and had a home worshipping,” says the Rev. Elizabeth Lewis, deacon.

IMAGE: ADAPTED FROM VISUAL GENERATION

The Rev. Douglas Lewis, Elizabeth’s husband and the locally trained priest that pastors the congregation, has, on the days he presides, moved from a sermon to a more interactive style of discussion. He has also experimented with different services, drawing from the ecumenical Iona Community, Lutheran liturgies and the *Book of Common Prayer*. Since they lost their building, the community has actually grown by one parishioner.

Still, though, the congregation hopes to one day have some kind of regular accommodation to worship in, says Douglas. “We had 15 groups that used the facility, and we had to evict them all because it had to close. So we regret all of that. And the people that used the facility certainly have found it difficult to find anywhere else to meet.”

Groups like Alcoholics Anonymous, Girl Guides, a food pantry—even a local blues band that needed practice space—all used to rent space in the church. In a village with few community centres—the only other available space is a large hall with no small meeting rooms—the church building’s loss is being felt, Lewis says. She also notes that the church is less able, with no building of its own, to put on the community dinners and events it used to host (including an annual, popular Robbie Burns bash).

Still, Douglas says, the loss of the building presents an opportunity to “find new ways” to do outreach.

When asked if congregation members would recommend becoming a house church to other congregations in similar situations, Douglas replied, “It depends on people and circumstances. We’re lucky; we’ve got a couple of good lay readers, we’ve got myself and my wife, who are ordained.... If you don’t have some kind of leadership, it’s not going to work.”

The Lewises also note that theirs is an aging congregation. The 12-15 members that attend range in age from their 60s to their 80s. (The priest for their parish of Kootenay Summits, the Rev. Neil Elliot, is the General Synod statistician who released a report to the Council of General Synod this fall; the Lewises’ church is one of the congregations that collected demographic data mentioned in Elliot’s report.)

Such new ways of doing church could

be important trends in the years to come, says the Rev. Judy Paulsen, professor of evangelism at Wycliffe College and former parish priest in Oshawa.

“I think we’re almost at that point [where] we can’t afford to care for these grand buildings,” says Paulsen, whose doctoral work involved studying Fresh Expressions, the U.K.-based initiative that launches new forms of church aimed at welcoming people who are not yet a member of any church congregation. “We’re realizing that we may actually have to revisit what church is and how we do it. So I think the rise of the house church is one of those really interesting phenomena.”

While the Anglican Church of Canada has very few home churches, Paulsen says that it is a growing category in other Christian denominations, along with church plants and new monastic-style intentional communities—or a hybrid of all three, like the communities of the MoveIn Movement. She even notes a case of a Baptist church in the state of Washington planting an Anglican church inside an Anglican building.

“[Church planters] are actually really interested in some things that Anglicans have to offer,” she says. “They don’t really need our buildings, but what they like is...our broad orthodoxy. They like that we’re creedal, they like that we are part of a worldwide communion. They like that we have a deep historical rootedness.”

The challenge, in Paulsen’s view, is that Anglican churches need to work on being apostolic. She notes that according to a 2017 Angus Reid poll, 30% of Canadians have no connection to a church but are “privately faithful,” and most of these would like their children to be taught by a faith community.

“The gold standard for me as a professor of evangelism is, in this age, are we baptizing adults? Are we offering a reaffirmation of faith to adults?” she asks. “Because if we’re not, then it means...we’re basically not taking the message out.”

While Paulsen says she believes in the importance of neighbourhood church buildings, she also says the building should be secondary to the work of the church. Paulsen says that the future of the Anglican Church of Canada will involve “figuring out how to do church without buildings.”

“When you start to study change theory, it’s always from the margins.... If you have some kind of organism that is exposed to a change of environment, it’s always the organisms on the edge, on the margins, that sort of begin to be able to adapt, and I think you see signs of this in organizational life as well...things that are brand new that nobody thought of. And then suddenly those are the things that thrive when everything else is kind of going belly-up.”

Joining together

A far more common practice for congregations struggling with mounting financial obligations, aging buildings, or dipping attendance numbers is the church merger. In recent years, many Anglican churches around the country have joined congregations with others nearby, or even with local Lutheran churches. In the diocese of Qu’Appelle, a merger has been proposed that would see seven churches in the Regina



area possibly amalgamated into a single congregation.

In August of this year, the parish of St. Martin's in Chester Basin, N.S., merged its four congregations into a single church: Grace Anglican Church.

According to church wardens Doug Ridgewell and Donna MacKinnon, the merging process began years ago when the parish began holding Reimagining Church discussions, workshops intended to get congregations thinking creatively about mission. What they found were churches that were increasingly using their resources to maintain century-old church buildings—and heavily relying on the volunteering abilities of their mostly senior congregations.

Between four different church councils (one for each church) and a parish council, Ridgewell says, they were struggling to fill 60 positions in a parish that had about 83 congregants.

Transportation was another factor. “[The churches] were built at a time when...everybody in the community went to church. That was their social centre, it was their spiritual centre, it was everything. They'd walk to church...And now, we're such a mobile society and not as many people are going to church.... From one end of the parish to the other, it was only a 15-minute drive by car. So you can see the situation where it didn't make sense to have four churches, given our financial and human resources,” says MacKinnon. “It makes emotional sense for people to keep their churches. But it does not make practical sense.”

Discussions about merging the churches began in 2016. While the process was a smooth one, and was well-supported by the diocese and its parish vitality coordinator, the Rev. Lisa Vaughn, Ridgewell and MacKinnon say the process took too long. “We took far too much time to do it,” says Ridgewell. “It took us four years; it could have easily been done in two.”

In hindsight, MacKinnon agrees—though she adds, “We took our time to do it correctly.... You can't rush it. You must do your homework, and be informed. But on the other hand, like I said, don't prolong it—you're going to have to put your faith in God and move forward.”

The most difficult part of the process, they say, was for the congregants to accept that their beloved church would close. As of press time, one of the closed churches has been sold, and another is in the midst of a sale.

Though no one left during the process, the number of parishioners has diminished by about 30% since the churches merged, MacKinnon and Ridgewell say, a number consistent with what the diocese told them to expect. But for those that continue to attend,

▲ **“There's no reason we couldn't have people gathering in homes,” Archbishop Linda Nicholls says. “We already do that for Bible study—nothing to say that we can't do that in groups of 15 or 20 for worship.... It's one possibility.”**

IMAGE: ADAPTED FROM BOYKO PICTURES

the experience has been positive.

“The dynamics are different” when attending a church with 50-60 congregants, rather than 15-30, MacKinnon says. “The psalm, the prayer, the going for Eucharist and seeing so many people partaking.... There's a joy of being together. We've had, already [since August], three major fundraisers. Instead of just a small group, you have a larger group all pulling together and working together, and they've been very successful, and there's been a joy around it. Those who work together get along extremely well. And it's been a coming together and getting to know one another more.”

Strategizing for the future

Reorganization, of course, is an option not only at the local level. Another Canadian mainline denomination, the United Church of Canada, recently underwent a massive restructuring process in the face of its own declining membership.

As of 2019, the church has simplified its governance structure, replacing two of its former layers of governance—presbyteries and conferences—with a new set of 16 regions. Accreditation, oversight and discipline issues now fall under a new national Office of Vocation.

Nora Sanders, general secretary of the United Church of Canada, says the process of restructuring began with a proposal first brought to the table in 2012, at General Council, the church's national meeting held every three years. The comprehensive review task group appointed at that meeting consulted widely over the following three years. After proposed changes were approved at General Council in 2015, the restructuring plan was voted on by the church's congregations and presbyteries, and enacted at General Council in 2018.

The ultimate purpose, Sanders says, was to simplify the church's structure, “so that we weren't spending a greater proportion of our resources on governance all the time.” With both financial resources and volunteer base diminishing, she says, it was important to find a way to keep those resources from being “swallowed up by governance processes.”

Re-evaluating customary ways of doing things—the “things that were just habit”—Sanders says, can spark interesting questions about what it really means to be church. Congregations were renamed “communities of faith,” Sanders says—a way of leaving the door open to a greater variety of expressions of worship outside of a traditional church building. “I think that's our future. Not that we'll ever be without congregations—I sure hope not—but that there will be more...ways of worshipping together.”

In the previous structure, congregations paid a portion of their income to their

presbyteries, and each presbytery paid some to its conference. Now, communities of faith pay a single bill, which is collected by the national office and distributed by way of a grant back to the regions. Administrative and governance costs for the national church—which used to come out of Mission and Service donations (donations made directly to the service work of the church)—are now taken out before this redistribution.

The idea was to keep governance costs “tied to the size of the church,” says Sanders. “For example, if there were... fewer congregations that were paying an assessment, then our national and regional structures should probably be smaller, too.... It kind of forces us to respect the size of the church in how we think of the size of our governance and administration.”

Financial concerns are raising questions about structure in the Anglican Church of Canada also. Diocesan proportional gifts—portions of diocesan revenue, in turn largely made up of parish apportionments, that are sent to the national church—have been falling increasingly steeply, accounting for a significant drop in General Synod's revenue [See ‘CoGS roundup,’ page 2 of this issue].

When asked if there would ever come a time when it would be necessary to examine whether Anglicans need a national church, Nicholls told the *Journal* that part of the strategic planning process the church is embarking on would involve “asking questions about, ‘What is the role of the national church in relationship to the ecclesiastical provinces and the dioceses?’” However, she responded that she believed the national church to be important as a link to the wider Anglican Communion. She also noted the important work being done on the national level, including the work of the reconciliation animator, Global Relations, the department of Faith, Worship and Ministry, the Primate's World Relief and Development Fund and the Anglican Foundation of Canada.

Nicholls said strategic planning would help the Anglican Church of Canada assess, “based on the resources that we will have available, what can we best do at the national level...and what things do we let go of, because we can't do them any longer? What things do we share in other ways with dioceses and individuals across the country?”

One of the things the national church does best, she said, is tell the stories of what is happening in the church across the country.

“We need to be listening to one another and finding the best practices, not simply taking something from here and plopping it down over here, because that doesn't work,” she said. “You have to say, how does what they're doing spark something in me that would fit here?” ■

“You can't rush it. You must do your homework, and be informed. But on the other hand, like I said, don't prolong it—you're going to have to put your faith in God and move forward.”

—Donna MacKinnon, warden, Grace Anglican Church



'Green shoots'

Community outreach fuels thriving congregations

Matt Gardner
STAFF WRITER

Newly released statistics showing that the church's membership has continued to fall since 2001 have drawn new attention to the outliers of this trend—parishes and congregations across the country that are thriving. At this fall's meeting of the House of Bishops, after the bishops had received a report on the statistics, Archbishop Linda Nicholls, primate of the Anglican Church of Canada, asked them to ponder "the 'green shoots' that we need to nurture." The call was taken up at the November meeting of the Council of General Synod (CoGS),

which saw CoGS members gather in groups to discuss the healthy congregations in their areas, and identify the factors they had in common.

The Anglican Journal spoke to five thriving churches, some of which were even facing closure before managing to turn things around. While each had unique elements that have helped fuel their growth, a shared feature in all five parishes or congregations was ministry focused on outreach to the local community.

Parish of Salisbury and Havelock, diocese of Fredericton New Brunswick



PHOTO: CONTRIBUTED

St. John's Anglican Church in Salisbury, N.B.



PHOTO: CONTRIBUTED

A school dance hosted by the Parish of Salisbury and Havelock



PHOTO: CONTRIBUTED

Children hear a Godly Play story during a summer event.

IN THE RURAL parish of Salisbury and Havelock, three of four Anglican churches were no longer in use at the time the Rev. Chris Hayes arrived as the parish's new rector in 2012. The closed churches included St. Paul's in Havelock, St. Peter's in River Glade and St. Andrew in Petitcodiac, the latter of which had closed down earlier that year.

After six months of low attendance at the only church that remained open, St. John's in Salisbury, Hayes asked the vestry if it could re-open St. Andrew so that the parish had churches in the two largest villages within it (Petitcodiac and Salisbury have populations of 1,400 and 2,400, respectively). Though initially reluctant due to the high expense of running both buildings, they soon acquiesced.

Immediately after the parish re-opened St. Andrew, some people who had stopped attending church in the parish returned. The "novelty factor" of a new priest in the area also brought more people out, Hayes says. At the time of the re-opening, his wife Christine suggested starting a play group for parents and caregivers of young children.

"That was one of the first things we did outside of worship services, and that was met with some great response," Hayes says. He calls this period a "formative time" for the parish, establishing its new focus on "reaching out to serve the needs of the public rather than just try to get the public to come to them.

"Since then, I've been trying to teach this great emphasis on mission for the kingdom as opposed to mission for the empty pews," Hayes adds. "I think we're getting it now. Most of...the things that came across our collective desk are things around serving the needs of the community, rather than trying to simply boost attendance or increase

“ Any church that's willing to put on a dance for the sake of the kids is a church I'd like to get my kids baptized in.

—A father who was picking his children up from the dance one night

the bank account.”

A major initiative on this front was the construction of a playground on the large piece of land in front of St. Andrew. The parish received grants from the diocese and the New Brunswick Children's Foundation, a local charity, to fund the project, which brought more local residents to the church.

A flurry of other outreach programs have increased ties between the parish and the community. These include visits to seniors' homes, vacation Bible school and a breakfast program for elementary schoolchildren. St. Andrew itself hosts preschool and play groups for children, yoga, soap-making classes, community craft sales and other activities.

One of its most prominent activities is hosting elementary school dances.

Hayes likes to tell the story of a father who was picking his children up from the dance one night and asked him why the church was hosting the dance. When Hayes explained the parish's efforts to reach out to the community, the parent responded, "Any church that's willing to put on a dance for the sake of the kids is a church I'd like to get my kids baptized in."



Is your parish growing? The Anglican Journal may feature it in an upcoming story. Contact Matthew Townsend, editorial supervisor, at: 416-924-9192, ext. 207 or mtownsend@anglican.ca

St. Stephen's Anglican Church, diocese of Saskatoon Saskatchewan

ST. STEPHEN'S ANGLICAN Church describes itself as seeking "to be a Christ-centred, Holy Spirit-led, outward focussed, caring community." The church hosts a diverse range of groups, including a bridge club, English learning class, Alcoholics Anonymous, a cooking group, residents of local seniors' homes and a youth group—the latter of which includes both young Anglicans and those with no connection to the parish.

St. Stephen's also recently started celebrating the Eucharist forward from the altar—the step of which

previously posed a potential tripping hazard for older members of the congregation—and changed the format of vestry meetings to include Bible study.

"Instead of coming together and discussing the sometimes mundane business of vestry...we actually have Bible study before we have the meeting," rector's warden Chris Wood says. "If we have the meeting, great, and if we don't, we don't. But it's more about the Bible study."

Since then, the number of people wanting to be on vestry has jumped from 8 to about 15. "People are

being energized by just a different way of interpreting how things should be done," Wood says.

Outreach to the community, he says, has helped lead to growth for the parish. Wood estimates that between 2016 and 2019, the number of families attending worship in the parish rose from 100 to 120.

"I think it's being...a place that lets them know that the church is there, that the church is...a presence to the neighbourhood, and just allowing the doors to be open and allowing groups to come in," he says.

St. Jax Montréal, diocese of Montreal Quebec

ST. JAX MONTRÉAL IS a church plant launched in 2016 at the site of the historic St. James the Apostle Church. Prior to the launch, St. James was faced with negative cash flow, expensive buildings, a lack of new members and no clear plan for growth, says the Rev. Graham Singh, the parish's current incumbent.

Singh first proposed the idea of a new church plant to the diocese of Montreal. What eventually evolved into St. Jax was based on the model of Singh's own former congregation of Holy Trinity Brompton in London, England.

The diocese dissolved the parish of St. James and took over direct control of the congregation. It provided a pastoral care plan for the 30-40 remaining members of the congregation that saw most transfer to two other churches, St. George's or St. Matthias—though some chose to remain at the new St. Jax.

During his tenure as incumbent, Singh says, St. Jax has seen a rise in attendance to the point where about 250 people now call it their church home. Singh describes St. Jax as "a multigenerational, multi-ethnic, multi-confessional congregation," with many Chinese members as well as members from Iran, Lebanon, Africa and the Indian subcontinent. It is also multi-lingual: clergy at St. Jax on Sundays offer greetings in English, French, Spanish, Arabic and Mandarin Chinese.

Singh says the growth of the church is based primarily around a "participative form of worship."

"To an outside traditional Anglican observer, it would look a heck of a lot like a community church," he says. "It would look less like a traditional Anglican church. What that means is we focus on things like Alpha courses, marriage courses, informal worship. We don't celebrate the Eucharist every week. We have time for small groups, and we try to make that as participative a form of worship as we can."

The Alpha course is a vital element to ministry at St. Jax. Singh believes that catechism is a necessary foundation for church growth. He describes the Alpha course as one of the most widely used catechisms around the world, highly regarded by multiple denominations and teaching people the basics of Christian belief over a 10-week period.

"The church always...had catechism in Sunday schools, at times when Christendom meant that that's how you began your journey of faith," Singh says.

In 2019, however, "an entry to



PHOTOS: TOP: THILBAULT CARRON; SECOND ROW: COURTESY OF ST. JAX

Ministry at St. Jax has a strong focus on informal worship and small group discussions, along with activities such as craft-making, charity auctions and musical performances.

catechism is by no means assumed. So we need to start with an environment where adults with a choice about their faith can ask questions. To me, that is the key to church growth."

St. Jax also has a thriving children's and youth program primarily led by university students. "The idea of starting a new church tends to attract younger people," Singh says.

A different area of growth for St. Jax has been sharing its space with other non-profits and charities in the area. Many such organizations are being priced out of Canadian cities and cannot afford to rent facilities, Singh says.

Meanwhile, many church buildings are sitting empty.

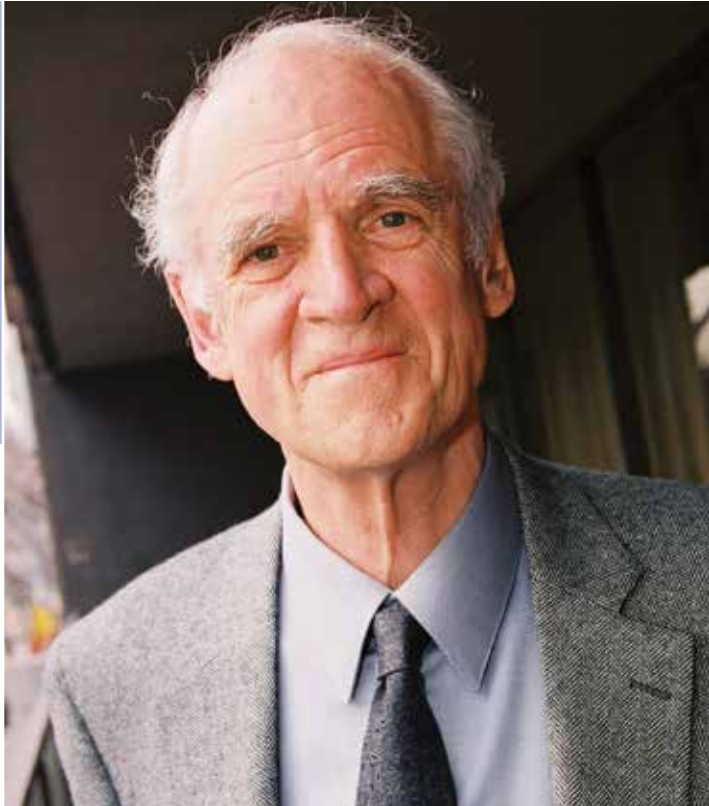
Sharing that space with non-profits and charities allows the church to participate in the "sharing economy" in a way Singh compares to online lodging broker Airbnb, while also enhancing ties between the church and other organizations. St. Jax now pulls in \$200,000 in revenue each year by renting out its space to more than 70 groups or organizations, including non-profit circus company Le Monastère, refugee charity Action Réfugiés Montréal and a municipal concert series.

Singh believes that the Anglican

Church of Canada must respond to declining membership by being open to radical change. As executive director of the Trinity Centres Foundation, which works to transform churches into community hubs, he seeks to help other churches follow a model similar to St. Jax's and find new sources of funding.

"What we can do from the national discussion [on church decline] is prepare the ground to say, 'Yes, indeed, we really do need these kind of radical solutions. So let's hear what they are,'" he says. "And then not be surprised when we say, 'Boy, that's radical.'"

See **CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER** on p. 18



Churches may shrink but will survive in our secular age,

says philosopher Charles Taylor

Tali Folkins
STAFF WRITER

FOR A PROFESSOR of political science and philosophy, Charles Taylor was already unusually widely known by the turn of the millennium. Taylor had taught at his alma mater, McGill University, from 1961 to 1997 and written several books—on the German idealist philosopher G.W.F. Hegel (*Hegel; Hegel and Modern Society*); the modern ideas of personality (*Sources of the Self; The Making of the Modern Identity*) and of self-fulfillment (*The Malaise of Modernity*) and other topics. He had involved himself in public affairs also, serving on the Quebec government's advisory council on the French language and as vice-president of the federal NDP. Taylor had even run four times for a seat as an MP—once, in 1965, against Pierre Trudeau.

In 2007, however, Taylor's prominence, especially among people concerned with religion, increased with the publication of *A Secular Age*, a tome whose 874 pages attempt to explain how secularity arose in the Western world, and what that might mean for us today. The same year, Taylor won the Templeton Prize, an award—worth \$1.8 million at the time—granted by a U.S. foundation to recognize people who have contributed to “research or discoveries about spiritual realities.” Other prestigious accolades have followed. This fall, Taylor was named co-recipient (with Father Paul Bere, a Biblical scholar from Burkina Faso) of the Vatican's Ratzinger Prize, honouring theological studies. Taylor's writing “allows us to deal with Western secularization in a way that is neither superficial nor given to fatalistic discouragement,” Pope Francis said in presenting the award.

Now 88, Taylor is one of Canada's most recognizable philosophers. The *Anglican Journal* spoke with him on why so many congregations in Western countries are shrinking, and what the future might hold for the Anglican and other established churches. Taylor's tone was jovial and the conversation interspersed with laughter, which has been noted in this piece.

This interview has been edited for length.

Why are fewer people going to church?

It's very hard to put your finger on this, but this is what I'm trying to work out: that there's another kind of spiritual life, spiritual searching, going on to a great extent in our contemporary West—

▲ Taylor is one of Canada's most recognizable philosophers.

PHOTO: MCGILL UNIVERSITY

“It's not that religion is disappearing, or spirituality is disappearing; it's taking different forms.”

sometimes it's in totally different religions, or totally non-religious—and that this somehow is taking off at the expense of an earlier way of expressing one's spirituality, which involves being members of national churches or in the case of a very diverse country like Canada, at least a church which you know is very big and solid in some parts of the country.

It's not that religion is disappearing, or spirituality is disappearing; it's taking different forms. If you put yourself in the mindset of people, in particular of younger people, who are concerned about the meaning of life, concerned about becoming better people, more loving, more open, etc., and are seeking in some way some discipline—it could be meditation, it could be various things—if you put yourself in the mindset of these people, when they go to the pews the *least* bad thing is that they don't feel it's very relevant! The worst thing is they feel that their whole way of approaching this is not really appreciated and it may be seen as threatening the people in the pews. Now of course this is perhaps more the case—I'm a Catholic—in the case of the Catholic church [laughs], where you have these very backward-looking people who are screaming abuse at [Pope] Francis and so on [laughs]!

That's the extreme case, where you actually feel, “I'd better rush out of this place [laughs]! Or I'm going to be badly treated.” But the least worrying or problematic [for those outside the church] is just that this is not a concern that people [in the pews] recognize, this searching concern. “Everything is all settled, and we're all together in these pews affirming it.”

So there's a feeling among people that churches don't recognize this searching concern that comes out of their individuality?

“Coming out of individuality” is not the way I would put it. It is an individual search, but you can find yourself alongside many, many, many other people who are on a search too, and what is peculiar about this new culture, new religious/spiritual world of searchers, is that they not only appreciate associating with people on the same wavelength but they're actually interested in talking to people who are not. There's a lot of inter-talk between people on these different lines. If a Christian meets a Buddhist,

there's the same kind of searching goal, right? They're interested in talking to each other, exchanging and learning from each other and so on. It's not necessarily highly individual—simply *my search*, and so on—though it can be that, if people don't find like-minded other people who are on similar tracks. But if they do find people who are on similar tracks there's quite a willingness to meet together, exchange—they're curious about each other, right? So a different kind of sociability, if you like, is arising in this culture.

Is it that there's a spiritual restlessness, and to people who are restless, the church seems to represent fixed answers?

Yes, that's certainly true. One of the great things that put me on to this idea was an experience. You know what I mean by Taizé, this community in eastern France? One of my daughters was working there for a while, and I was really deeply impressed with it, because they have Bible study and things like that, but their approach to all these kids is, “What are you looking for? What are you struggling with?” They listen. And the effect is tremendously positive. Of course, a lot of these kids have a certain affinity for the Christian faith in order to go there, but there's a lot of people who are on the fringes of, “Do I really want to? How far do I want to go?” And they're not asked to sign anything, they're not asked to go anywhere, they're just given a response to their questions.

And there are other kinds of sociabilities that are going on. What I belong to is the World Community for Christian Meditation. Do you know [Fr.] John Main? This is something he actually started in Montreal [laughs], which we all believe is the centre of the universe! It was started by an Irish Benedictine. [Former Archbishop of Canterbury] Rowan Williams has very strongly recommended this, and has talked to our group several times. But it's the same kind of thing—its core was Catholic, but there are a lot of non-Catholic Christians in there, and there are even people in there who feel themselves to be searchers. And it's a practice of meditation which comes from Christian traditions. So this is another [instance] of where people who are on a search are happy to be part of this sociability—but not the other kind.



“We have a tremendous feature of modern Western culture which I call the ethic of authenticity—the idea that everybody has their own path, [wants] to seek their own path and not simply conform to existing models.”

If I’m right about this, it would explain why there’s a steady decline in standard church attendance and a tremendous growth in these other kinds of religious or spiritual gatherings.

Because people prefer a type of gathering where there can be free range to express their—

That, but also where they feel that they’re getting enriched and helped on their journey, you see. Many other people in this meditation group think it’s not incompatible to be a member of a given confession and to think of your religious life primarily as a journey. You know, we have [St.] Gregory of Nyssa, [laughs] St. Augustine, and a few other people like that! But for people who don’t sense themselves firmly within a certain church tradition, to walk in and just join the people in the pews, hear the sermon, etc.—there can be a sense of, “They’re not really talking about me.” Or else even hostility. But even if there’s no hostility, they feel that, so instead of going to the Anglican service and so on, they may well strike out on one of these other modes of meeting other people, where they feel, “I’m really being helped along.”

Where does this modern spiritual restlessness come from?

Well, I think there are two sources here, and I keep rethinking this [laughs]! But I’m not sure of any of this, right? This is just my take on it. We have a tremendous feature of modern Western culture which I call the ethic of authenticity—the idea that everybody has their own path, [wants] to seek their own path and not simply conform to existing models. It’s something that starts with the Romantic period—then it was really very alive among, if you like, cultural creators. Interestingly, from the Romantic period on, you’re not considered to have made a great work of art unless it has originality, right? Whereas if you go back to [medieval icon painter] Andrei Rublev—“Originality, what do you mean [laughs]?!”—and then in the post-Second World War it becomes something in the general culture in the West—“Do your own thing,” and that kind of slogan. It encourages people to search for what their model of life really is.

The second thing is that—this is where the standard atheists have a point, but they haven’t understood the point very well [laughs]—in a certain sense, our

▲ Taylor points out that Christ’s capacity to truly see the woman at the well is one missing in modern society, which seeks to categorize.

PHOTO: ANGELIKA KAUFFMANN/WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

churches were established in a world in which the cosmos had metaphysical meaning. If you go far back enough there were actually magic forces, etc., in the world, and we have a world now which most people see as a big machine with very mysterious [laughs]—with no necessarily obvious purpose. Their idea of our societies is not that they’re modeled on the order of the cosmos—it’s [that] societies are set up in human history, contingent on some revolution, etc.—so it’s a cold background compared to what it used to be in any of the great religions. Where the atheists are obviously wrong is that there’s deep hunger in human beings to find this kind of meaning, and even in some sense transcendence, and the idea that that’s going to disappear tomorrow [laughs]—you’d have to be very unobservant [laughs] about human life to think that! But it doesn’t mean that these big changes in our understanding of our position in the cosmos haven’t shaken a lot of people loose.

How do you mean they’d have to be very unobservant to think that?

Well, I mean, just look around you [laughs]—I may be in a particular position because I taught university for a long time and I meet a lot of young people, and it’s just evident. There’s a great deal of searching going on among lots and lots and lots of them, but this [spiritual] searching is also among a very substantial proportion of them. One of the ways that you can see that is that they get very turned off by people like [British atheist Richard] Dawkins. Even if they’re not themselves subscribing, they say, “This is really somebody pounding away, because he has no ear for what is bothering people.”

Is it possible the “ethic of authenticity” you speak of could have arisen ultimately from Christianity itself?

Oh, definitely, definitely. It’s a kind of mutation of the idea that there are many vocations, right? That’s something very deeply into the whole Christian tradition, right back. There are these different vocations, different life paths that make up the communion of saints, if you like, in the end. So it’s definitely a mutation of that, but a mutation which started off in this not necessarily religious movement, which is the Romantic period.

“Mutation” strikes me as an interesting choice of word, with a possible negative connotation. Do you mean that something bad happened?

No, no, no [laughs]—the theory of evolution tells us there are happy mutations! Musically, it’s like a change of key.

It seems to me that in the Gospels, the individual through Jesus has what you could call a direct conduit to absolute truth. So it sounds like a demand for authenticity could come almost inevitably from that.

Yes, I think that’s my reading of the New Testament. One of the extraordinary things about this figure for people around him was that *he saw me*. It’s told in a slightly different form, but this is what I get out of it. He’s in Samaria and he’s saying, “Give me a drink at the well,” and it turns out he knows all about the woman’s life.

[Austrian philosopher] Ivan Illich [says] that this capacity to really see people is one of the things we’re most missing, particularly in a modern, bureaucratic, very large-scale society. We operate in large categories—you’re a welfare recipient, or you’re an old age pensioner or something of that kind, and we have to set up rules, etc., to deal with this. Big bureaucracies are inevitable [in] their great failing—that they don’t recognize how different people are. And this is a very striking thing to me. Maybe I’m speaking as a modern who is very concerned with this over-bureaucratization in society. But I think that the whole sense we get that we’re missing something when we just operate with those categories comes from the gospel.

Jesus sees people in all their individuality.

Yes.

Is it possible for Christians to see the will of God in this trend of declining church attendance?

Well, yes. I admit I’m not a theologian. But I want to introduce the concept of an itinerary, of a way that people come to God. And there is an immense amount of different itineraries in our past—

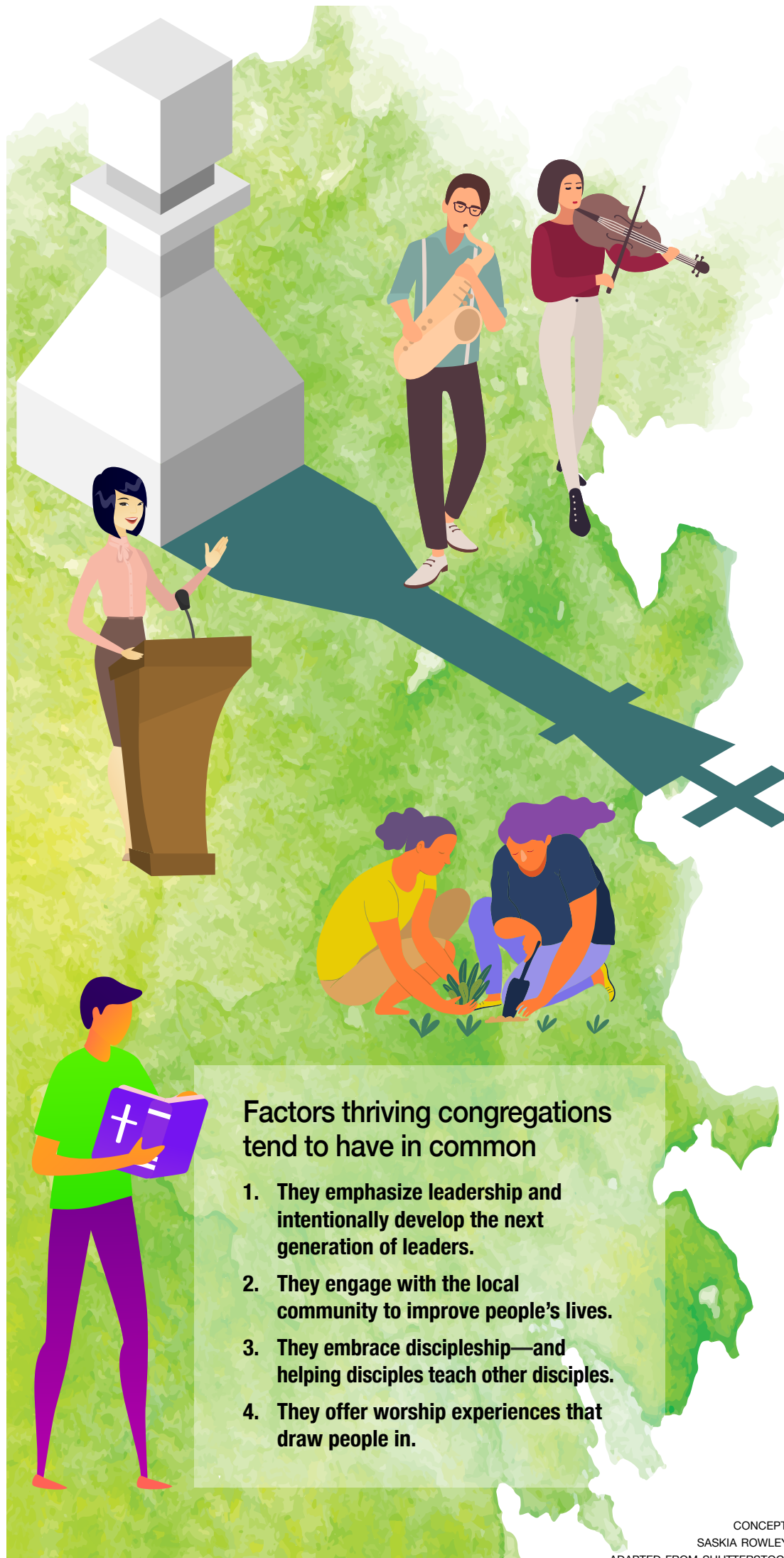
Demographic, cultural changes key to declining church membership: Sociologist of religion

Research also finds common threads in growing congregations

Matt Gardner
STAFF WRITER

SHIFTING IMMIGRATION PATTERNS and broader social changes are key factors in declining membership within the Anglican Church of Canada, according to a sociologist who studies religion

in Canada. But while many Protestant denominations face similar challenges, growing congregations also exist within these traditions that share a number of common features.



Factors thriving congregations tend to have in common

1. They emphasize leadership and intentionally develop the next generation of leaders.
2. They engage with the local community to improve people's lives.
3. They embrace discipleship—and helping disciples teach other disciples.
4. They offer worship experiences that draw people in.

JOEL THIESSEN, a professor of theology at Ambrose University, a Christian university in Calgary, has written four books that deal with the sociology of religion. As director of the Flourishing Congregations Institute, Thiessen has also studied thriving congregations in various Christian denominations.

For Thiessen, recent statistics showing the Anglican Church of Canada's continuing membership decline were not unexpected. He says they reflect a wider trend from the last half-century that continues to afflict many churches.

"It's a common reality across mainline Protestant traditions," Thiessen says. "Your Anglicans and your Lutherans and your United Church and Presbyterians are confronting all of these similar realities, so [the Anglican statistics are] not surprising in the least."

Though he would not "necessarily" come to the same conclusion as Anglican Church of Canada statistician the Rev. Neil Elliot—who said in his report to the Council of General Synod (CoGS) that the current rate of decline would lead to zero Canadian Anglicans by 2040—Thiessen acknowledges that membership is falling across all mainline Protestant churches in Canada.

"There's no doubt that the trend is downward," and all indications, he says, suggest that trend will continue. Thiessen cites the 2017 book *Leaving Christianity* by Brian Clarke and Stuart Macdonald, which documents how Canadians began moving away from organized religion in the 1960s and how that process has only accelerated in recent years.

In the particular case of the Anglican Church of Canada, Thiessen believes that changing immigration flow has been the leading factor behind the drop in membership. Several decades ago, he says, the Anglican church benefitted greatly from mass immigration to Canada from Western Europe, particularly England.

"Christianity remains the number-one religion among immigrants to Canada today, and that is declining and changing," Thiessen says. "But I think specifically for the Anglican church in the mid-20th century, many of our immigrants came from Western Europe, England, Scotland, Germany, etc.... The Church of England was directly feeding the Anglican Church of Canada via these high immigration patterns.

"What we've seen since the 1970s or '80s is this shift towards immigration from the global South and East, that are not dominated by the Anglican church. They're perhaps led by Pentecostalism, Islam, the Catholic church—these are some of the big winners, if you will. So the Anglican church hasn't benefitted in ways that it once did."

The second demographic factor behind the decreasing number of Canadian Anglicans is the church's aging membership, he says. The proportion of young people in the church shrank over the last generation.

"The Anglican church doesn't have a strong track record of actually retaining their youth," Thiessen says. "This mass decline we see in part is driven by an aging denomination, and as people die, there isn't a younger cohort that is actually



replacing [them].”

Declining birthrates across Canadian society, compared to high post-war birthrates that produced the baby boom generation, are another factor, he says.

Broader social trends have also contributed. Thiessen says the rise in people who identify as having no religion is partly a reaction to “the perception that religious groups are far too conservative.” Many Canadians, he says, identify Christianity with conservative white evangelicals in the United States and lump all Christians together as having the same views.

“As society in Canada has become more liberal and progressive over time, what has happened is people have become more resistant to some conservative elements within Christianity,” Thiessen says.

“We do see, for example, some who have left the Anglican church and other churches over some of [their] orthodox beliefs on various topics and issues,” he says. “At the same time... there is a growing capacity within the Anglican church, not just in Canada but worldwide, to try to provide a broader tent that accounts for a broader theological spectrum from conservative to liberal.”

Along with the widespread view of Christianity as conservative, the decline in people who identify as Christians since the 1960s may have been affected by perceived scandals and hypocrisies within the church, Thiessen says.

Could declining church membership also be reflecting a more general drop in participation in civic and community organizations? In his 2000 book *Bowling Alone*, U.S. sociologist Robert Putnam described a reduction across the United States of in-person social interactions and civic engagement over several decades.

The most recent study by Statistics Canada on civic and political engagement, published in 2015, actually showed a rise in the percentage of Canadians who are members of a group, organization or association. While the study covers only the period between 2003 and 2013, it reports that nearly two-thirds of Canadians (65%) in 2013 were members of such groups, up from 61% in 2003. However, participation in religious-affiliated groups decreased from 17% to 14%.

Martin Turcotte, senior analyst at Statistics Canada and author of the 2015 report, emphasizes that the study covers a broad range of organizations, from trade unions to religious groups to sports teams. He notes that Putnam’s book used only American data, and that it also covered a much longer period of time.

“We have to remember it’s only a 10-year-period, so we have to be careful about overinterpreting the trends over time,” Turcotte says. For participation in all kinds of organizations, “we can’t deny that there’s a slight increase for participation overall. But it does vary by [the type] of organization, and as you see for the Anglican church, there was a slight decline for participation in religious-affiliated groups for Canada as a whole.”

The main trend Turcotte identifies in the report for participation in religious groups is the

▲ **“The Anglican church doesn’t have a strong track record of actually retaining their youth,” says Joel Thiessen, a professor of theology whose research focuses on the sociology of religion in Canada. “This mass decline we see in part is driven by an aging denomination, and as people die, there isn’t a younger cohort that is actually replacing [them].”**

PHOTO: CONTRIBUTED

decline among people aged 55 to 64, or older baby boomers, from 20% to 15%. He notes that Statistics Canada will conduct a new general social survey on social identity next year, likely to be released in 2021.

“It is known that religious participation was higher among previous generations, and those people were aged 65 and over in 2003,” Turcotte says. “We see that for these people, it’s pretty stable over the period... It will be interesting to see what happens with the new data when these baby boomers enter... the so-called senior group, [of] people aged 65 and over.”

Thiessen also cautions against painting with too broad a brush in looking at civic organizations in Canada, considering the wide diversity of groups and demographics who participate in them.

“There are some very distinctive reasons that are contributing to declining involvement in religious groups,” he says.

However, while researching a recent book on millennials in Canada, Thiessen and his co-authors did find a general trend from in-person to online interaction.

“We know, for example, that people might talk a lot on social media about different causes within society... that people have high levels of talking online,” Thiessen says. “But levels of actual involvement with physical human beings and organizations are fairly low. So I think one of the things we see has shifted is that people are transferring some of their involvements to an online atmosphere, and less face-to-face activity.”

The Flourishing Congregations Institute, Thiessen says, has found a number of factors that thriving congregations tend to have in common. While some Anglicans could feel discomfort around Thiessen’s findings, these factors may offer a glimpse of how some churches have bucked the societal trends.

One is emphasizing leadership and intentionally developing the next generation of leaders by creating “meaningful opportunities for young people to lead, to train and to mentor them.” Congregations that do this, he says, are better able to retain young people while also building long-term organizational stability.

Outreach is another common element in growing Christian churches. Engaging with the local community to improve people’s lives can greatly strengthen congregations, Thiessen says.

A third quality is discipleship—or what Thiessen describes as “forming people’s spiritual lives and taking that as the core business of what congregations exist to do... creating opportunities for people to meaningfully deepen their spiritual life,” and helping disciples teach other disciples.

Finally, successful churches offer worship experiences that draw people in, he says. They employ effective communicators to deliver sermons that are relevant to people’s lives, and provide music that appeals to them.

The question of how to get more young people involved in the church is one that often preoccupies Christian denominations with aging memberships. Thiessen credits many conservative Protestant congregations with being particularly

successful in retaining youth.

“One of the things we know is religious groups who have more conservative religious beliefs and practices tend to take their faith more seriously, and tend to take their transmission of faith to their children more seriously,” he says. “Therefore, they’re actually more active within the home, they’re more active in taking their children to church, they’re more active in seeking out churches that have these youth programs and youth outlets, those kinds of things.”

Increasing the number of young people in the church, Thiessen says, “starts with having some younger demographics in your church to begin with who are having children and reproducing, and then actually taking faith socialization seriously within the home. That’s your starting point.”

Subsequent steps include having programs for children in the form of Sunday school that are fun, but also theologically significant in developing a young person’s faith; offering youth programming in later years that can provide enjoyment for teenagers while further socializing them into a Christian tradition; and providing liturgy and music that appeal to youth.

“The style and form of music actually makes a really big difference for young people,” Thiessen says. “The kind and style and quality of preaching and teaching that engages young people, that speaks to the current issues of the day, and can convey things in compelling ways that maybe draws on social media... I think these are some of the things that we know from traditions that are... retaining young people.”

The number-one reason a person joins a faith community, he says, is that someone they know has personally invited them. When young people who are part of a subculture invite their friends to participate in shared activities, such as a youth hangout at church on Friday night, their enthusiasm can be contagious.

Thiessen says there remains much more to religious life today than might be suggested by statistics showing membership decline in some denominations.

“There are massive amounts of people worldwide, and still not an insignificant number of Canadians, who find great resonance with their churches’ teachings and with their religions’ teachings that are extremely impactful, that are a critical source of meaning for them to interpret their day-to-day life and experience,” Thiessen says.

He encourages the church to learn from other Christian traditions that are faring well in Canada, such as Pentecostalism, which, he says, offers to its members “a highly experiential expression of religious life.

“It is helping individuals to connect their beliefs and practices with their daily experiences, is speaking to culturally relevant issues of the day, is creating spaces and places for involvement for leadership development for young people to get involved,” Thiessen adds. “All these kinds of things would suggest that there still is a great opportunity for different religious traditions to engage individuals in meaningful ways.” ■



PHOTO: CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

Kids learn about horticulture during a summer activity.



PHOTO: CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

Rainbow decorations for Toronto Pride



PHOTO: THOMAS EVERS

Palm Sunday at Church of the Redeemer



PHOTO: THOMAS EVERS

Anglicans at Church of the Redeemer carry banners to mark the Season of Creation.

Church of the Redeemer, diocese of Toronto Ontario

Continued from p. 13

IN TORONTO, extensive growth has been seen at the Church of the Redeemer—a change witnessed first-hand by incumbent Canon Steven Mackison, who first served there 20 years ago as associate priest and priest-in-charge before returning in August 2019.

During the 1970s, Church of the Redeemer suffered from falling attendance and financial difficulties. Then-Toronto bishop Lewis Garnsworthy wanted to close the building, but a group of 10 women in the congregation appealed to him and led efforts to revitalize the church.

Church lands were sold to developers, which allowed the congregation to regain control of its finances. The church engaged in a number of building projects, including a facility for its outreach ministry to the homeless, The Common Table.

The congregation's overall trajectory has been one of success. On a typical Sunday, Church of the Redeemer now sees 400 people attend over the course of four services, up from 300 two decades ago. These include three morning services and an evening service that can take different forms—from traditional Anglican evensong to Bach vespers to its monthly “rock Eucharist,” in which the church weaves music from contemporary artists into the liturgy.

In explaining why Redeemer has thrived, Mackison recalls a quote from Protestant theologian

Frederick Buechner: “Vocation is the place where our deep gladness meets the world’s deep need.” He believes that the broad ministry at Church of the Redeemer accounts for much of its growth.

Its most recognizable outreach ministry, The Common Table, serves 100 meals a day to the homeless and working poor from Monday to Friday, as well as offering psychiatric care, medical care from a parish nurse, referrals and other services. University of Toronto students staff and volunteer the outreach program, while the church attracts other students from two local Anglican colleges, Trinity and Wycliffe.

Church of the Redeemer has sponsored 11 refugees in the past four years through its refugee resettlement program. It has working groups devoted to Indigenous solidarity and the care of creation. And it is highly supportive of the struggle for justice and acceptance by the LGBTQ+ community, participating enthusiastically in the annual Pride parade.

“All these are sort of emblematic of what I think is responsible for the church’s growth,” Mackison says. “And that...really is responding to the Holy Spirit in our midst, leading us into deeper and deeper truth in each generation by addressing what the immediate needs of the community and the world are and responding to them as Christians.”

St. Luke’s Anglican Church, diocese of Fredericton New Brunswick

LESS THAN FIVE years ago, St. Luke’s Anglican Church, in Saint John, N.B., was on the brink of being shut down. The church had fallen on hard times. An “urban renewal” project by the city had led to the disappearance of much of the surrounding neighbourhood, leaving an economically depressed area in its wake.

By 2015, only 45 people attended services on a typical Sunday. Heating expenses for the building—a massive structure, built in 1876, that seats up to 800 people—totalled about \$20,000 each winter. “That’s a big hit when your Sunday income hovers around \$2,500,” says interim priest-in-charge Canon David Barrett, who began ministry at St. Luke’s in 2016. A developer expressed interest in buying the property and tearing down the church, though that deal fell through.

What kept the church going, Barrett says, was its active outreach program. With the help of a part-time outreach worker, the church provides hot lunches on Mondays and Thursdays and hot



PHOTO: CONTRIBUTED

As part of its outreach program, St. Luke’s offers two hot lunches and a hot breakfast each week.

breakfasts on Tuesdays, coordinating with a local Baptist church that provides meals every weekday. An estimated 65-70 people come out to St. Luke’s for these meals.

St. Luke’s also offers free clothing

to whoever needs it. It provides free haircuts once or twice a month and foot care provided by a local volunteer. Every Christmas, the church hosts a Christmas dinner for 50 families.

The turnaround for St. Luke’s, Barrett says, began with the appointment of a full-time priest-in-charge. The filling of this previously vacant position, he suggests, provided some stability for the parish and a sense among some congregation members that the church would not be closing after all.

Another stabilizing factor was a \$60,000 grant from the diocese to install heat pumps, which significantly reduced the cost of heating and further reassured people. The diocese provided funds to hire a young, full-time assistant curate, Cole Hartin [see Hartin’s reflection on p. 20 of this issue], who is active in the community and has provided another boost for the church. “People have really responded to him being there,” Barrett says.

Finally, attendance at St. Luke’s has increased due to a number of families from India, largely of Orthodox

backgrounds, who moved to Saint John and gravitated towards the congregation. About a dozen Indian families now worship at St. Luke’s and their ranks include a warden and members of the vestry, he says.

Today, 100 people attend St. Luke’s on Sundays. Barrett hopes to increase that to 120 next year. Increased attendance and fundraisers enabled the church to pay off its five-year loan from the diocese in two years.

Barrett points to outreach as a major factor in the church’s revitalization. Local residents, he said, “see what a great benefit it is to the people of Saint John, so people have really rallied behind that to keep it going and contribute to it, both with their time and their financial resources.”

The outreach program, he adds, has drawn people “because they see we’re a church who’s doing something for the community. We’re not spending all of our time wondering, ‘How are we going to keep our building open?’... We’re not focusing on ourselves. I think that’s the answer.” ■

20 - 40 vision

20- to 40-somethings in the Anglican Church of Canada offer their thoughts on the future

Statistical projections suggest that the Anglican Church of Canada might cease to exist by 2040 (see page 1). While the church faces significant questions about its future, there are young Anglicans who plan on seeing that future, whatever its shape. The

Anglican Journal reached out to some of the church's younger theological thinkers to ask for reflections on church decline and what they anticipate in the years ahead. Their responses follow.—Matthew Townsend, editorial supervisor

The declining church formed me

Canon Martha Tatarnic
RECTOR, ST. GEORGE'S ANGLICAN CHURCH,
ST. CATHARINES, ONT.

I GREW UP in a struggling rural church. The Sunday school was small. By the time I got to high school, I was one of only a couple of nominally involved youth left. St. James' Hanover was part of a two-point parish for its whole existence, which means it was never big enough to sustain one priest's whole salary on its own. The stories of full-to-bursting Sunday schools reported to me by the bigger churches in which I later served—stories of confirmation classes of hundreds—these were so hard to believe that only the pictures of 400 smiling children assured me that this was not made up.

I didn't go into ordained ministry thinking that it would be a full-time, lifelong career. One of the reasons why I struggled against that sense of call so desperately was that I wanted to work in a field that would be financially stable and viable—and even 25 years ago when I was just considering this horizon, the church didn't look like it would tick those particular boxes. When I reoriented my path toward seminary—both compelled and reluctant—I was told at every juncture of discernment that, despite the large amounts of time and money that I was pouring into my theological education, there was no guarantee of a job at the end.

The decline of the church doesn't surprise me. It formed me.

That being said, my 15 years of ordained ministry in this declining church have been full of surprises.

IN PASSION: Although it is tempting to long for the "golden days" of the church, when a leader (always male then, so these imaginings only take me so far) could look out on congregations that seemed eternally full and generative, the joy of ministering in congregations that consist of people who have made a very distinct choice to



▲ **"I am still heartened to find among people in their teens, twenties, thirties and forties those who, like me, find themselves able to follow Jesus because of the charisms of our Anglican church."**

PHOTO: CONTRIBUTED

be there cannot be underestimated. People no longer come to church out of habit, to be part of a club or because it is in any way expected of them. They are choosing to be there rather than choosing to be hundreds of other places. The church may be declining, but so is the polite Anglicanism with which many of us grew up. Our spiritual hunger is being laid bare.

IN CONNECTION: I was odd among my high school friends for attending and being involved in my church. But as an ordained leader, I have had the opportunity to connect with countless people my age and younger who also want to step out of the mainstream and embrace the weirdness of our church. If there has been a consistent frustration in those years, it has been the never-ending litany of older people of the church telling me "what young people want" in the church. It turns out, strangely, that young people are just as diverse a group as I remember in the halls of high school. While I no longer particularly qualify as young in most circles, I am still heartened to find among people in their teens, twenties, thirties and forties those who, like me, find themselves able to follow Jesus because of the charisms of our Anglican church: because of our connection to the past and our reformed insistence that God is still working on us; because of our poetry and symbols and sacramentality, as well as the intellectual freedom we encourage.

IN FAITHFULNESS: The church is not the only seemingly staid institution of society that has been radically reimagined in the past decades. Those who work in music, journalism and even the funeral home business (what could have seemed like more of a guaranteed industry than that?) have had to reinvent themselves, often at a pace much faster than the church. The instability of our institutional life encourages a kind of radical faithfulness that is its own gift. As my friend Rob

Hurkmans says, the only thing to do when you're in over your head is to get on your knees. There simply is no option for setting budgets, offering programs, or opening the doors of our churches without resting in the promise of the God who does do more than we can ask or imagine. Every day in ministry is an opportunity to wade into the metaphorical waters of baptism again, to watch old ways die before our eyes and to participate in the new thing being born.

IN GROWTH: The biggest surprise for me in the declining church has been the experience of growth. I have gotten to be part of churches that have grown and flourished in ways that I couldn't have imagined growing up in my struggling, rural church. I don't believe that numerical growth is guaranteed into my future as a church leader. But I also don't believe it is impossible. Researcher Dave Haskell offered a study several years ago on growing mainline churches. In a phone conversation with me after the study had wrapped up, he noted that the common denominators among these growing churches could be boiled down into this: *growing churches expect God to act*. There are a lot of ways that we need to define growth, and those who get trapped into thinking that numerical growth is the most important indicator will be in trouble in more ways than one (ironically, the so-called declining church still insists on measuring growth almost exclusively by numbers).

The thing about expecting God to act is that we can rarely anticipate what God's activity is going to look like. But what my formation in the declining church has surely taught me is that Christ has built this Anglican church for all of these years because weird people like me are also valued disciples. It's up to us to steward the gift that is this church, in whatever form it needs to take; it's up to God to continue to provide a way for people like us to seek and serve Jesus. ■



'Anglicans in Canada are in exile'

The Rev. Cole Hartin

ASSISTANT CURATE, ST. LUKE'S ANGLICAN CHURCH, SAINT JOHN, N.B.

THE ANGLICAN CHURCH of Canada is hollowing out. It's in steep decline. Some might call this a "free fall."

This shouldn't be a surprise to most of us. We're used to seeing almost vacant sanctuaries built to house congregations that no longer exist. We're used to seeing glorious architecture fall decrepit, standing like remnants from a lost world.

What may be surprising are the figures themselves. Seeing what was once a shadowy spectre in the background counted and tallied makes its threat imminent and real.

How do we make sense of all of this?

We make sense of it by recognizing we as Anglicans in Canada are in exile.

We are a church in exile in a culture that we have helped to create. Like Israel, we are few in number, being driven and scattered by the Lord. Surely, this is the result of our own sinfulness—and the sinfulness of our ancestors in the faith. We are seeing the iniquity of our fathers being visited upon us as children (though we also reap their blessings).

Yet we as a church are also Christ's body. Perhaps it is God's will to crush us, the way he crushed the body of Job, or the way he crushed the body of his Son.

This may seem pretty bleak. And it is. But what is the alternative? That God has somehow failed? That he is wishing us to prosper and his purposes have been thwarted?

I am not necessarily saying that God



▲ **"Prayer does not feel as productive as starting new programs. But I really believe this is the way forward: Grieving, deep grieving. And then prayer."**

PHOTO: CONTRIBUTED

has sent this difficulty on us, but perhaps he has. In any case I am confident he has allowed it. The God of infinite love and goodness—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—is allowing our churches to crumble. He has not abandoned us, but our decay continues, the stats tell us.

This is deeply discouraging, certainly.

What can be done about this?

I think the first step is to grieve and to lament. I for one, feel deeply grieved. I grieve often.

There has been a real loss for many people here, seeing a church that was once a "given," that has been there for generations, declining and closing doors. There is no happy ending in sight here. There is no hopeful glimmer on the horizon. Not yet, at least. I think we first must reckon with our loss as clergy, and with the loss experienced by our parishioners.

Then, I think it's time to pray. I admit I'm not a great example. I tend to try to work my way out of difficult situations. Prayer does not feel as productive as starting new programs. But I really believe this is the way forward: Grieving, deep grieving. And then prayer.

It's not the time to abandon ship on traditional parochial ministry either. I'm all for Fresh Expressions and innovative contexts for worship, but I don't see these as a viable way forward. Perhaps I am naïve, but I think local congregations are the lifeblood of the church, and they always will be, though thinned out and scattered farther apart than they have been.

One of the ways I see God at work in all of this is his purgative role. Any sense of pride one may have felt as an Anglican a generation or two ago is vanishing. We

do not have the cultural clout we once did. We are divided amongst ourselves over sexuality, tradition and how we read the Bible. We are in decline.

The mercy in all of this is that this suffering has the potential to make us humble. Humility allows us to recognize our own strengths and weaknesses with a clear head. It also enables us to recognize the blessings we can give and receive in the wider body of Christ. It's not so easy to scoff at the unrefined beginnings of Pentecostalism when it is a dynamic force in the wider church—and when we are trying to keep our heads above the water. We are most apt to share in the pain of our sisters and brothers in the mainline and Roman Catholic churches when their trajectory looks very much like ours. These bonds can only be forged in the humility that is born out of our failure.

The projections tell us that there will not be church in 20 years. I don't know about that.

Though we are suffering as a whole, I see pockets of growth. Much of this is in the North. But even here, where I serve in Saint John, St. Luke's is a congregation that was once in decline and is now growing. The growth is slow, but it is steady. If I look at the trends in our congregation from the past five years, it should be thriving in the next 20. Dioceses are declining, but some parishes are bucking the odds.

My family and I will be around in 20 years, God willing. I may not have a remunerative position as a priest, and I have thought about that and how it might look. This is discouraging, and not something that would be easy. But I will continue to serve however I can, in the capacity that I can. ■

Recapturing our lost virtues—mission and evangelism

The Rev. Orvin Lao

COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS PASTOR, LITTLE TRINITY, TORONTO

THE RECENT STATISTICS on trending decline in the Anglican Church of Canada came as no surprise to me. I have only been a confirmed Anglican for almost five years and an ordained minister for a couple of months. Before I pitched my tent in the church, I was well aware that mainline churches were in cultural decline. But I believe it is God's calling in my life—as it is for all those presently in the Anglican Church of Canada—to remain, to work and to pray for such a time as our decrepit and palliative moment in our church's life here. It is only a moment in our ecclesial life *culturally*, but the life of the church is invincible, immortal, everlasting, ever-moving—divine. And our divine life is in our Lord Jesus Christ, who will be returning soon to restore everything under His dominion. The church's life in Jesus is why I press on in prayer, why I can labour not in vain and why I bring one foot forward in hope.

I believe the cultural decline of the Anglican Church of Canada is the work of God. It is the pruning work of the Master Vinedresser to discipline and refine us. He is removing the fence on which many Anglicans have sat too long and comfortably. There can no longer be a limping between two dominions: either



▲ **"As a church, we must embrace again our God-given identity as exiles and sojourners in this world."**

PHOTO: CHRIS L / SHUTTERSTOCK

Jesus is Lord and God, or He is not. It is God's merciful action to displace our church from her improper place of cultural power, societal clout, and generational wealth and ease. The church enjoyed the long years of Solomonic plenty but has since been weighed down by corpulence and sloth, miring ourselves in Solomonic apostasy. We were never meant to *enjoy* our pilgrim days in exile; we were meant to work, to witness and to wrestle in prayer.

As a church, we must embrace again our God-given identity as *exiles* and *sojourners* in this world. We must never feel at home here, for our home has not returned from above. Until then, we must prepare ourselves and the whole realm of humanity to be tabernacles of God's Holy Spirit. This means we must labour for the *conversion* of people unto the Lord Christ

wherever the church exists, wherever Anglicans are present, beginning inside our parishes. We must confront our sins, the sins of our society, and call people to turn from evil and to turn to the gracious lordship of Jesus.

God is summoning us to bear witness to his gospel: to be as John the Baptist and his ancestral prophets, to warn about divine judgement against evil and to announce pardon, grace, and new creation for all who turn to Jesus. The Anglican church should be *making* more Christians, inviting everyone in and around our parishes to become followers of Jesus Christ.

We need to recapture and embody our lost and forgotten Anglican virtue of mission and evangelism.

Our church's biblical convictions have cooled, and most of our parishes are theologically confused, malnourished and erroneous, and have lost creedal confidence in the supernatural power of God's Word, in God's Holy Spirit, and in the historic person of Jesus—his virgin birth, his theanthropic life, death, bodily resurrection, bodily ascension, and bodily return. Our church does not need to be more culturally relevant or to be "with the times." We need to "hear, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest" God's Word. We need to take seriously and be especially convinced of Jesus's death on the cross as our *only* means of being reconciled to God and to each other. We need to take

See LAO, p. 22



▲ **"The church's life in Jesus is why I press on in prayer, why I can labour not in vain and why I bring one foot forward in hope."**

PHOTO: CONTRIBUTED



New wineskins for new wine

The Rev. Alison Hari-Singh
ASSISTANT CURATE, ST. MARTIN-IN-THE-FIELDS,
TORONTO

THE RECENT STATISTICS report for the Anglican Church of Canada begs unavoidable questions: What factors account for the ongoing decline of the Anglican Church of Canada? And where is God in all of this?

While 20th century theological shifts in ideas may provide some explanation, we cannot overestimate the effect of sociological developments and the growth of scientific knowledge. One such development is the rise of global migration. In the earlier part of the 20th century, immigrants to Canada hailed, by and large, from countries where Christianity was well established. But this was followed by significant arrivals of people from various countries where other religious traditions flourish. The upshot is that Anglicans are now living side-by-side with Muslims and Sikhs, Hindus and Buddhists.

As these neighbours have established themselves, they have built their own mosques, temples and other sites of religious devotion. Many of us have wondered how the compelling integrity of their faith practices makes sense in light of the church's claim that Jesus is the saviour of the world. Moreover, our experiences of religious diversity have fueled the secularism that defines our age which, according to Charles Taylor, is not necessarily antagonistic to faith but rather regards faith as optional and peripheral. This accounts in part for why interfaith marriages are now more common and accepted, and for why some of us have been less diligent to pass on the church's faith to our children.

Another development—a major crisis—is the exposed record of abuse in the church. It is not only Roman Catholic clergy and officials who are guilty of a staggering



▲ **“What is the Christian ‘thing’ all about? Our confusion about this question has stifled our movement forward.”**

PHOTO: CONTRIBUTED

number of child sexual abuse cases. Sexual abuse has also plagued the Anglican Church of Canada, especially in the Indian residential schools that it administered. Despite the church's best efforts to apologize and provide redress, Anglicans have sustained a black eye from which we will long be recovering. Every new instance of clergy sexual misconduct is a setback to that recovery and a deterrent to anyone considering entering *any* church building. Trust has been lost.

Developments in scientific knowledge have also challenged the viability of our church. The content of our liturgy and our hymnody—indeed, the scriptural metanarrative that undergirds the church's faith—is shot through with a cosmology that grates against modern discoveries in astronomy. We are learning that the universe is immeasurably immense, continually expanding, and perhaps even boundless. The idea of “heaven,” as its own transcendent space, no longer makes much sense to the modern mind. How many of us are committed to the intellectual gymnastics required to confess with integrity that the Son of God “came down from heaven,” has now “ascended,” but will “come again in glory to judge the living and the dead?”

Other developments have shaken Anglican confidence in the first of the 39 Articles of Religion, which affirms that God “is the Maker, and Preserver of all things both visible and invisible.”

With the production of nuclear weapons, humans now have the capacity to detonate all of planet Earth with just the push of a button. Earth's climate, as we

all know, is warming at alarming rates because of human activity. The human condition has reached a new Babel: “this is only the beginning of what they will do; nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them” (Genesis 11:6). It is not only human potential for global destruction but the evidence of its actualization that have led many to question whether God is there to preserve us from self-annihilation.

Is God there? Is God in the midst of the church's decline? We cannot answer these questions with a simplistic “Yes.” That's because the realities named above compel us to reexamine not only tangential issues of faith but core matters as well. Anglicans are unclear about the horizon of our faith. What is the Christian “thing” all about? Our confusion about this question has stifled our movement forward. We are too comfortable with the world to act with confidence, as Jesus did, to bring good news to the poor and to struggle against principalities and powers.

We must reimagine the entire edifice of our faith, including what we mean by “God” and divine attributes of sovereignty, providence and love that we so often instinctively depend on. In short, we must embrace a radical theology of risk, unhindered by suspicion and fear of the unknown. We cannot be afraid of what Peter Berger called “the heretical imperative.” What will happen when we undertake together this fundamental reimagination? Our liturgies will become more creative. Our mission—our love for the world—will be intensified. Our imitation of Jesus will be palpable.

The decline of our church fills me with anticipation, even hope. What will we do with the new wine? Will we pour it into the old wineskins and lose everything when those wineskins burst? Or will we find new wineskins to pour the new wine into? ■



PHOTO: BW FOLSOM

God truly works in mysterious ways

Shilo Clark
YOUTH MEMBER, ANGLICAN COUNCIL OF
INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

IBECAME PART of the church, at first, as more of an observer. In 2015 my grandmother was invited to Sacred Circle, one of the largest gatherings of Anglican Indigenous peoples of its kind. At the age of 72, she had not been on an airplane before, so I volunteered to go with her. Little did I know at that time Sacred Circle would change my life.

I'm sure most people are aware of the decline in the church, but I personally was shocked by the actual numbers. According to the statistics report released this fall, membership in the Anglican Church of Canada could fall to zero by 2040 if its current rate of decline continues. I feel that this is a frightening

and sad prospect indeed. I am sad, because I have seen the result of this back home, where even just paying rent for our church building has been a huge struggle for our church, and we have since had to rent out part of the building, just to help cover costs. It's sad to see mostly empty pews, whereas when I was a young child, the times I did attend church then, the pews would be full—all the way to the back.

That being said, one cannot wallow in those sombre feelings for too long, and I see where I stand in this—not only as a youth, but as an Indigenous youth. It is important that all of us who are saddened by this trend of decline stand with each other in the pursuit of finding unique and innovative ways to bring those numbers back up. The church has provided faith and peace for so many people, over so many years, and I feel it is so important for the church to evolve with the changing times of this world. Today individuals find themselves on such a wide spectrum of beliefs, culture and personal identity, and this must be recognized by the church if we are to see an upwards trend in church attendance. The voting down of changes to Canon XXI [On Marriage in the Church] was, in my opinion, a step in the wrong direction for raising attendance numbers. Tradition is a very big aspect of church, but I feel as the

world changes, traditions can adapt and evolve with the times.

We can see adaptation. The passing of legislation on the emerging self-determined Indigenous church was a huge deal for me. It meant the traditions that were taken from us Indigenous peoples are no longer seen as evil, and they have a place in worship. This has given me the fuel to go forward and help educate my young peers—and in a world where Indigenous folks face racism in their lives, I hope the church can now feel like a safe place to belong to.

Similarly, I think there ought to be many more initiatives directed towards youth, giving them a glimpse of what the church has to offer them in their lives. I think it would be neat to have social initiatives that bring youth and elders together to share intergenerational wisdom—to learn together, to pray together and to walk with God together.

I don't see this current decline in the church as an ongoing problem for us. We are taking steps forward by discussing it with each other, by educating and finding ways to engage our youth and by embracing this emerging Indigenous church. Together, as one people, we are in the midst of a great time of change and evolution. Standing together will make us stronger, and we will

See CLARK, p. 22



▲ **“Today individuals find themselves on such a wide spectrum of beliefs, culture and personal identity, and this must be recognized by the church if we are to see an upwards trend in church attendance.”**

PHOTO: CONTRIBUTED

► **Logo of the ninth Sacred Circle, born by water and spirit**

PHOTO: ACIP





PHOTO: USTAS7777777/SHUTTERSTOCK

Living as footnotes to the story

Canon Jeffrey Metcalfe

CANON THEOLOGIAN, DIOCESE OF QUEBEC AND INTERIM PRIEST, ST. MICHAEL'S, SILLERY, QUE.

"To live in the church in North America is to assume that our critique of the church is the most important, that our problems are the most significant problems in the universal church."—Mary Jo Leddy

WE NEED TO begin with a perspective check. As Canadian theologian Mary Jo Leddy argues, as Christians living in North America, we inhabit an imperial imagination. Simply put, the imperial imagination is a way of seeing the world that begins with the assumption that "it's all about us." Whether you want to describe "us" as the story's heroes or villains, we can assume that we are the most important and most interesting characters in the story, that our action or inaction is driving the plot, and that whether the story turns out right or not will also depend on us.

The imperial imagination is a problem because it runs against the grain of one of the most basic claims made by our faith: *the story does not belong to us*. We are neither its authors nor its principal characters. We are not responsible for ensuring that the story comes out right. Indeed, we make the audacious claim that the Great Storyteller has already revealed to us the story's arc in the life of Israel and the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Our role then, rather than authorship, is attribution. We are to live our lives as footnotes to that story.

With that qualification in place, let's turn to the catastrophic statistical projections that concern us. By 2040, two of the church communities I have served as a priest will have completely collapsed because they are *already* falling into the



▲ **"Our buildings might decay beyond our capacity to repair them, our plans to redevelop the hall might fall through, the church mice might finally overthrow us, subjecting us to their dominion. These are realities we must deal with, but they do not overwhelm us, because we know we don't have to make the story come out right."**

PHOTO: MATTHEW TOWNSEND

sea due to the effects of climate change. By 2040, shifting rainfall patterns, ocean acidification and extreme weather events are expected to lead to global food and water shortages, limiting the necessities of life for a significant amount of the planet's population, and the majority of the world's Anglicans. By 2040, nearly 50% of our fellow creatures will be extinct. Oh, right, I was supposed to be writing about the Anglican Church of Canada's survival in 2040, wasn't I?

In terms of statistically motivated survival stories, the Anglican Church of Canada's is neither the most interesting, nor the most important. Whether and how we tell the story of our church's institutional decline, the level of importance we give to it in our discourse can also be a product of the imperial imagination.

Over the last year, I have been blessed to share worship and fellowship with a group of about 20 or so Christians in a Quebec City parish. We often meet in a small, beautiful and decaying neo-Gothic church building in an area of the city whose gentrification has long since prevented most of us from living nearby. Our church hall is currently propped up by giant cinder blocks. Hot water has long ceased to flow through our bathroom faucets. We no longer use the word "church mice" as a metaphor.

As a church community, we know our institutional existence is fragile. Our buildings might decay beyond our capacity to repair them, our plans to redevelop the hall might fall through, the church mice might finally overthrow us, subjecting us to their dominion. These are realities we must deal with, but they do not overwhelm us, because we know we don't have to make the story come out right. This frees us to focus our energy on becoming more faithful footnotes in the time and in the

place that the Great Storyteller has given us—to care as much about our rivers as our rolls.

Only God knows the contributions these footnotes might make. As John Henry Newman writes about St. Benedict's ministry:

He found the world, physical and social, in ruins, and his mission was to restore it in the way, not of science, but of nature, not as if setting about to do it, not professing to do it by any set time or by any rare specific or by any series of strokes, but so quietly, patiently, gradually, that often, till the work was done, it was not known to be doing. It was a restoration, rather than a visitation, correction, or conversion. The new world which he helped to create was a growth rather than a structure. Silent [women and] men were observed about the country, or discovered in the forest, digging, clearing, and building; and other silent [women and] men, not seen, were sitting in the cold cloister, tiring their eyes, and keeping their attention on the stretch, while they painfully deciphered and copied and re-copied the manuscripts which they had saved. There was no one that "contended, or cried out," or drew attention to what was going on; but by degrees the woody swamp became a hermitage, a religious house, a farm, an abbey, a village, a seminary, a school of learning, and a city. Roads and bridges connected it with other abbeys and cities, which had similarly grown up; and what the haughty Alaric or fierce Attila had broken to pieces, these patient meditative [women and] men had brought together and made to live again. ■

Lao: Make Jesus known—in our parishes and beyond

Continued from p. 20

seriously and be especially convinced of Jesus's bodily resurrection as our *only* means towards cosmic justice and transformation. Clergy need to preach and teach these things in their homilies and sermons. Parents must teach these things to their children who are baptised in the church. We are not God's people if we are not people who believe and trust His Word.

I am hopeful that the Anglican Church of Canada will persist 20 years from now. God has granted us still the management of enormous resources, assets, materials and real estate. But those are not our most treasured possessions. We have the creeds, our Bible, our common prayer, our history of missionary and theological enterprise, our liturgical heritage, the beauty of biblical language and sacred music, our global presence and ecumenical relationships, our

sacramental conviction and participation—these are our Anglican conduits through which the Holy Spirit still chooses to work. Let us therefore step up, stand up and live up to the historic, apostolic, and catholic richness of our Anglican heritage to declare Christ crucified, to make Jesus known and glorified, to call all people to repent and believe His Holy Gospel, first in our parishes and throughout the places that we are in. ■

Clark: We can come together as family

Continued from p. 21

be stronger still, as we will be guided by the love and grace of our God, our Creator. Not only do I not see our churches still open in 20 years—I can see them beginning to flourish.

Many times God has been with me, and due to the bleak nature of the times through

which I was living, I failed to see him. As time passed, and as I opened my mind and heart, I began to realize: he truly works in mysterious ways. Instead of receiving magical, immediate strength when I prayed for it, I was presented an opportunity to be stronger in mind, body and soul.

As we consider the decline of the church, I see God presenting us with the

opportunity to come together as a family. As a family we can fulfill what community truly means—we can lift each other up and embrace whatever may be on the horizon. I am always reminded of Mathew 18:20: "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, I am there in the midst of them." I think this is very important to remember while looking ahead to the future. ■



Looking toward God's own pruning

The Rev. Leigh Silcox, PhD
PRIEST-IN-CHARGE, ST. MATTHIAS' ANGLICAN CHURCH, TORONTO

ONE WEEK AGO, members of the diocese of Toronto gathered for synod. Of the many important things presented, the issue that actually stood out most to me was that of the Anglican Church of Canada's statistical decline of 40% since 2001. This sort of rapid and large decline has, of course, not gone unnoticed by anyone within the Anglican church. Since I returned to the Anglican church (from agnosticism) 14 years ago, this reality has been a topic of ever-present consideration for me as a student, then priest and theologian. While my own home parish, Trinity Anglican, in Cambridge, Ont., was thriving, I quickly discovered that this was not the case for most congregations around the diocese of Huron, and eventually, within the Anglican Church of Canada.

I can recall hearing many statistics and suggested social and cultural reasons for decline, as well as suggestions—generally drawn from other places like England or the United States—about how dioceses and parishes could prevent or reverse that decline. And while I found several responses interesting, as a relative newcomer, I also wondered why various Anglican groups believed that their “late to the game” replication of forms of worship, of music, of alternative forms or places of gathering, etc., would attract people. These things were already being done by other churches with more diverse demographics, particularly that of young adults, with a greater critical mass of people and more operational resources per worshipping community.

I also worried that, in the midst of a culture that had grown up accustomed to endless choice of churches from which to shop, catering to that inclination would not only fail to attract simply because we were bringing weaker resources to a church-saturated market, so to speak, but that we were throwing away a niche gift that God had permitted us to develop. To be sure, I was worried and continue to worry about the decline of Anglicanism in the West for very practical reasons: salary, pension and vocational future. But my greater worry is actually our submission and habituation to secular benchmarks of value, worth and purpose that prevent us from humbly receiving grace that requires the obedient posture of penitence at this particular point in time and history.

These were the questions that I took with me to seminary and ultimately, that gave shape to my doctoral work. I found a repetitive pattern in God's condemnation of Israel's division, and his promise of



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PHOTO: MINTR/SHUTTERSTOCK

gathering and restoring them, and of this repeated scenario occurring in the New Testament where Jesus prays to make his disciples one—one body, his body—and their straying from ways of life that sustained that unity, and of this pattern occurring yet again with the church's divisions East and West, and finally the Western church in the 16th century. And I wanted to know: did we Anglicans heed the warnings of those into whose lives and circumstances we enter in Scripture? So the question I asked was this: as the Church of England had to grapple with the consequences of the Western church's division—a contradiction to Jesus's own prayer for concrete unity in life and witness—how could it go about discerning the truth in faithful witness?

What I discovered was that there was most certainly a strong drive for unity, called comprehension in the 17th century. But why unity? Why not simply scour for the truth of Scripture as individuals or congregations? Each of the mainline Church of England theologians whom I looked at, following Erasmus and Hooker, had a fairly straightforward underlying premise: an individual's ability to discern the truth is obscured or obliterated by the reality of the effects of sin. And the more one “goes off on one's own direction,” particularly with logical or emotional zeal, the more likely it is he or she will be deceived in pursuing the truth. The only way to mitigate (while not entirely removing) the effects of sin while trying to live faithfully in accordance with Scripture was to submit one's actions to the discernment of the church (in this case, of England). A proliferation of division could—for these theologians—only lead to habituation to one's own sinful inclinations.

The decline of the church in general, across North America, I would attribute to the Western church's division. What spiritual or moral truth could a divided, warring, often violent and contradictory confusion of beliefs that was once one body signify, except the inevitable human-constructed tower of power, control and

capacity to manipulate and mislead? If this seems a harsh judgment, please read more of the prophets and recognize our own figure in God's condemnation. Scripture is not a history book of past facts, but a living Word of judgment, mercy and reconciliation come to us in the Person of Jesus Christ.

What then are we to do, as Anglicans? First of all, perhaps strangely, I am happy for our decline. For too long, both Catholic and Protestant churches were filled with nominalist Christians for whom church has been a mere social club to exercise power, influence and money, rather than a school by which one is saved—that is, reshaped and reformed by God. I am happy for the decline because I see this as God's own pruning: pruning not so as to exclude, but in chastening, in pressing into the humility of confession, of prayer, of thanks, to open those who are called and willing to persevere in leadership, in worship and in service, within the particular temporal fragment of the body of Christ they are in.

What should be done? What did God do? He remained unto death, put to death upon the cross, took the very peculiar and particular life he took on, assumed, was sent to live out, and remained to witness just there. He did not leave for the newest or different or presumed true group of worshippers. He remained with broken, often erroneous, poor, hungry, sad, rebellious, depressed, sick, abused, confused, and tormented people—those whom he'd been given simply because of time and place. And so then should we. Though we shrink, the questions that arise from our shrinking are more pragmatic: should we continue with full-time priests, should we do house churches, should we rent facilities rather than have huge overhead, should we increase or decrease the size of dioceses, etc. But these questions are irrelevant if we do not first commit to remain where we are, despite the heartbreak of decline.

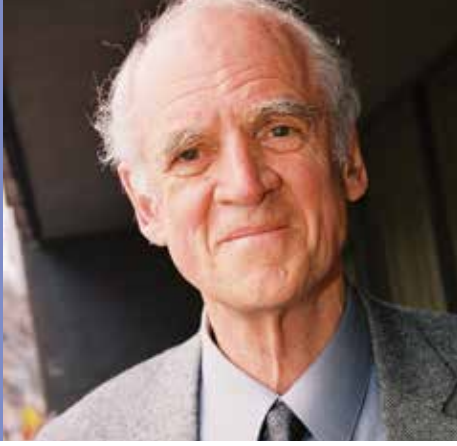
We are in good company here. See Jeremiah 29, or Job, or well, Jesus in the garden and on the cross. In our particular circumstances then, we will have to ask what it looks like to remain in a kind of exile, where we have sold ourselves into a kind of slavery to the nations that do not yet know God. Let us live among them, have and raise children, go about our work, ask if perhaps we should move our congregation of 20 into someone's house so that we don't have to worry about bills and can, instead, focus on learning the Scriptures more deeply; so that we can “go to the Greeks” and challenge and share and speak, as presumed fools, of the wisdom of God for which each person—since created by him—is actually deeply longing. ■

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THE INTERVIEW ▶



Taylor: God wants humans to live out restlessness

“There’s a way in which there’s a deep communication between human beings even where there’s no visible diffusion going on.”

Continued from p. 15

I mean, all the different saints have very different life courses, and there are very different things that trigger off their going ahead in the faith, and so on. And maybe the whole way in which humanity is going to be, if you like, penetrated with this relationship is if we go on acting out new itineraries which are necessarily new because the situation changes, right, but it takes all of these together to bring about a fullness of contact between God and humans. This is maybe too short and too telegraphic to be very clear!

Are you saying that, in a way, God wants people to live out this restlessness?

Yes.

Is that because he wants people to experience freedom?

Well, yes, I think certainly freedom is an essential part of it, because coming to God without freedom is not really coming to God. But I think there’s something about the whole sweep and development of history, that in order for the spirit of God really to penetrate very deeply into the human condition we have to have more of these itineraries or tracks coming from a different way of being human to the faith. That’s what ought to be going on in missionary territories, right? I think the genius of the early Jesuits was—with [Italian Jesuit] Matteo Ricci in China—that you find a route from this non-European culture to the faith, and it’s not going to be the same as what it was like in Spain, or Italy or anywhere in Europe.

Now, you could say the good of that is just that you have more members. No. I think the good of that is that the relationship between humanity as a whole and God is strengthened and deepened

when these very different starting points find a route to the faith. Don’t feel that there’s something totally clear here [laughs]! I’m very much just struggling.

Do you mean that if God wants people to be free, he wants them to find their own way to him?

Yes, that’s certainly true. But it may also be true that there’s something like—okay, I’m going to introduce another concept. It’s very vague, but the degree to which the spirit of God has penetrated the interhuman milieu in general—that there is such a thing seems to me to be evident from our history. Take things like the great axial changes, you know what I mean, that great epoch, I’m using [German philosopher Karl] Jaspers’s concept—are you familiar with that, the big changes—that somehow these occur at roughly the same period? There’s a way in which, I believe—this of course is the greatest leap of faith, and scientific minds just shriek in horror—there’s a way in which there’s a deep communication between human beings even where there’s no visible diffusion going on, contact, etc. And it’s that human milieu which is

Continued on p. 25



SUPPORTS INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND THE UNITED NATIONS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



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Continued from p. 24

something that gradually gets changed and more and more penetrated by the spirit of God.

And one of the things that makes that penetration more powerful and profound is connections from very different starting points that get made in places that didn't have any connection before—so that the whole penetration of the gospel into the human community has been greatly changed by the fact that there are now Christians in China, India, etc. That's something people can accept, if you put it geographically like that, but how about putting it temporally—see, that you have here another civilization and another context which is growing up for the reasons I mentioned earlier: the disappearance of the magic universe, and the meaningful cosmos and so on. It's like Ricci going to China, okay? And when Ricci goes to China he doesn't expect they're all going to say, 'Oh yes!' There has to be some back-and-forth in which you can discover a way in which they could accede to the faith.

I wrote something on this called *A Catholic Modernity?* in which I tried to make the comparison between these Jesuit missions in the 16th century and moving into the modern epoch. Consider it as the faith arriving in a totally new predicament. You have to help people find a way from where they are to that, and it seems to me that this great widespread culture of searching is the route by which this can come about.

So people are reaching God through an ever-greater variety of itineraries nowadays.

Yes.

Could you perhaps say that because of this, the glory of God is being revealed in a new way?

Yes.

But is all this searching actually going to lead to God?

Some of it will. Yes. The nature of searching of this kind—some of it will lead all over the place. But then we could easily imagine—I see this happening—

▲ Taylor cites the approach of Italian Jesuit Matteo Ricci, who worked to indigenize Christianity in China.

PHOTO: PUBLIC DOMAIN

“There are always going to be differences. The question is, what do we do with them, how do we face them, how do we relate to people across them?”

“So in a certain sense this culture of searchers can help produce a new kind of ecumenicism, which is not simply the ecumenicism of, ‘Let’s not fight,’ or the ecumenicism of, ‘Let’s stop hurling insults,’ but an actual ecumenicism of friendship, openness and so on. And I can’t help feeling this is part of what the gospel is calling us to.”

that Christians would enter into contact with Muslims and others who are also searching and find a lot in common, right? Find a lot that they could learn from each other. And find a way of living together. The interesting thing that is also feeding me is the following observation: that almost all the great religions are a little bit divided between people who are looking at their faith as a kind of journey and those who are very fixated on certain rules. Think of Islam—the very tight, narrow Shariah interpretations on one hand, versus various forms of Sufism on the other. There’s obviously more to it, but there’s a kind of parallel to our own situation in what you could call Christendom now. The interesting thing is that people who are very much into those rules are just a lot of the time itching [laughs] to get at the other guys, and are either very anti-Christian or anti-Muslim. And the people who are not—who are into the other kind—are really interested in listening, talking. So in a certain sense this culture of searchers can help produce a new kind of ecumenicism, which is not simply the ecumenicism of, “Let’s not fight,” or the ecumenicism of, “Let’s stop hurling insults,” but an actual ecumenicism of friendship, openness and so on. And I can’t help feeling this is part of what the gospel is calling us to.

Why do you say that?

Well, because this kind of openness to the other—trying to understand the other, trying to communicate with the other, not twisting their arms, not putting *a priori*, “You’ve gotta be—, before we start talking,” seems to me to be central to the gospel.

And the idea is that if there’s a greater interchange between these religions it wouldn’t just result in a kind of bland spiritual porridge, but perhaps it could stimulate members of each religion to more deeply understand their own tradition?

Yes, absolutely. And the idea of there being a porridge here is impossible. That’s not what religious faith is like—not just in our religion, but anywhere. It’s a set of practices, it’s a set of very powerful images, it’s a set of attempts to achieve relationship with something very different. And so we recognize that we’re not the same, we recognize we’re never going to be the same. The Dalai Lama has this wonderful expression, “You can’t put a sheep’s head on a yak’s body [laughs]!” The practices of being a Christian are very different from those of being a Muslim. There ought to be some overlap, but it is something different and you can’t run ‘em at the same time, right? You’re going to be one or the other or some third thing or fourth thing or fifth thing, right? So

the idea of them coming together is a chimera, it’s never going to happen, right? So in the end it’s such a kind of ineffectual generalization that it can’t be anybody’s religious or spiritual practice. So there are always going to be differences. The question is, what do we do with them, how do we face them, how do we relate to people across them?

What do you think might happen to institutional religion in this atmosphere of searching? Do you think the churches are likely to close in the coming decades?

No, no, no, not at all. Because the practice of Christianity, when you get really deeply into it, involves congregations, it involves churches, it involves sacraments and so on, that you can’t just reinvent or do on your own. But you could have a situation in which the number of people actually there and practicing is relatively small in the society, but the impact is great because it’s one of the broadcasting centres through which people, with their antennae out to get some kind of direction and spiritual growth, could be attuned, and will be attuned.

Think of how, in our respective churches, there are lots of people who are very much into this culture of searching, but for whom the sacraments or whatever are important, so they belong to a church. What’s happening in our church, and I’m sure this is happening in the Anglican church—I’m not sure, but I guess—that some people find distressing, but I think inevitable—[is that] “affinity parishes” come into existence. So in St. X, a lot of people are cursing [Pope] Francis—I’m talking about Catholics here—and saying, “Let’s have no artificial contraception,” etc., etc., etc., and in church St. Y, something quite different is going on—it’s more open, it’s Taizé-like, but people are together around the sacraments, which is important. But this is the way the thing is going to work out. The problem is in our church—and I think probably in your church too [laughs]—the problem is to stop the possible civil war between St. X and St. Y, you see. That is the big conundrum.

Are you saying there will always be churches because there will always be people who are able to reconcile their need to be authentic and their need to be seekers, with belonging to an institution?

Yes, because if you have some sense of the importance of the sacraments, for instance—if that’s part of your path—then there’s got to be a church for you. Not necessarily a building, but there’s got to be some kind of community where they say mass, or whatever the ritual is. ■

PEOPLE ▶



PHOTO: JOY MACCOMB

Greenwood succeeds Bishop Fraser Lawton.

Athabasca elects new bishop

Joelle Kidd
STAFF WRITER

Canon David Greenwood was elected bishop of the diocese of Athabasca at an electoral synod at St. James Cathedral in Peace River, Alta., Nov. 16. He was elected on the third ballot.

In an email interview with the *Journal*, Greenwood said the experience was “quite surreal, as in,

“Did that really happen?”

As a nominee, Greenwood says he felt worried, seeing the role of a bishop as a difficult one, with stresses coming from all directions. However, when the results came in, “I was quite surprised that the actual feeling I had was one of humility,” Greenwood says. “I am very humbled that God appointed me through the people of God electing me

in this part of his church.”

As bishop he says his vision includes bringing younger generations in to “join us in worship and working for the Kingdom of God,” as well as clergy and parish care. “Our clergy are quite spread out in dispersed parishes,” he says, adding that he looks forward to finding ways to build relationship with and nurture clergy and parishes.

Greenwood says he is excited for the adventure that he and wife Benita are now on, and that he is thankful for the

support he has received from her, from the diocese and the other nominees.

Greenwood has been a parish priest in the diocese of Athabasca since 2015.

He has been in the diocese since 1988, when he and his family moved to Fort McMurray. He worked for 30 years at Syncrude Canada Ltd., as a computer programmer, systems designer and architect, reporting architect and supervisor. In 2004, he was ordained as a vocational deacon; in 2012 he sensed a call to the priesthood. ■

General Synod hires communications director

Joelle Kidd
STAFF WRITER

The national office of the Anglican Church of Canada welcomed Joseph (Joe) Vecsi as director of communications in October.

In his role as director of

communications, Vecsi manages a team of 12 employees, overseeing the *Anglican Journal* and Anglican Video as well as the national church's social media and websites. He will also work with various committees, governance bodies, governments and

media outlets to execute the church's communications strategy.

Vecsi has worked in communications leadership across a number of industries, including public service, financial services, not-for-profit associations and health care,

according to an Anglican Church of Canada press release. He has had experience overseeing print and online publications, social and traditional media, government relations, strategy development and execution and crisis communications. ■

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- 02 Luke 2.22-40
- 03 **Hebrews 2.1-18**
- 04 Isaiah 6.1-13
- 05 Psalms 138.1-8
- 06 1 Corinthians 15.1-11
- 07 1 Corinthians 15.12-34
- 08 1 Corinthians 15.35-49
- 09 1 Corinthians 15.50-58
- 10 **Luke 4.31-44**
- 11 Luke 5.1-26
- 12 Luke 6.1-19
- 13 Psalms 1.1-6
- 14 Song of Songs 7.6-8.7

DAY READING

- 15 Jeremiah 17.1-13
- 16 1 Corinthians 1.4-17
- 17 **1 Corinthians 1.18-31**
- 18 Luke 6.32-49
- 19 1 Samuel 26.1-25
- 20 Genesis 45.1-13
- 21 Genesis 45.14-28
- 22 Psalms 37.1-20
- 23 Psalms 37.21-40
- 24 **Psalms 103.1-22**
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