

Returning Home from the Holy Land

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A section of the Anglican Journal



NIAGARA ANGLICAN

A Gathering Place and a Sounding Board for the People of the Diocese of Niagara — Since 1955



OCTOBER 2023

Feasibility Study Underway

Parishioners encouraged to attend town hall meetings and participate in online survey

A capital campaign feasibility study is underway, and Bishop Susan Bell is pleased with the response.

"Embarking on a major

fundraising effort in our diocese, for the benefit of our parishes, would be a significant undertaking, and so I want to hear from as many clergy, lay leaders, and

parishioners as possible before we proceed," Bishop Bell said. "I am really quite encouraged by the feedback and participation we have received so far but hope

that even more people will share their thoughts with us."

The online version of the feasibility study fact sheet and survey are available on the website niagaraanglican.ca. If you haven't yet participated in the study, please consider reviewing the fact sheet describing the needs to be funded in a potential campaign and then taking a few minutes to complete the survey.

In November, four town hall meetings will be held. These meetings are open to everyone to learn more about the proposed diocesan-wide, parish-focused campaign, ask questions, and complete a survey.

Below is a list of the dates and locations for the town hall meetings:

- **Thursday, November 9**
6 to 8 p.m.
Church of the Transfiguration,
320 Glenridge Avenue,
St. Catharines

- **Wednesday, November 15**
6 to 8 p.m.

St. Michael's, 1188 Fennell Avenue East, Hamilton

- **Tuesday, November 21**
6 to 8 p.m.

Church of the Incarnation,
1240 Old Abbey Lane, Oakville

- **Wednesday, November 22**
6 to 8 p.m.

St. George's, 99 Woolwich Street, Guelph

Attendees will have the opportunity to hear directly from the bishop about her vision and pastoral priorities for the diocese, and how the needs tested in the study will help advance God's mission in Niagara. The Steier Group, our development counsel, will also explain how the feasibility study will provide the diocese with the information necessary to make a sound decision about the potential \$20 million capital campaign.



St. Matthew's House Continues to Impact Community

ALICIA PAYNE

For more than 50 years, St. Matthew's House has provided essential support to those in need—from its humble beginnings as an Anglican "storefront" ministry to the fully-fledged charitable, diverse, multi-service organization it is today.

St. Matthew's House is a unique community support agency that provides childcare services and older adults/seniors



support services. It is a front-line organization committed to lifting up the most vulnerable people among us—connecting them with the necessities of life such as food, housing, and financial security.

Although there are very real challenges in the community

and tough work ahead, the team at St. Matthew's House is excited to share the impact that has been made in the community over the past year. We would welcome the opportunity to visit and meet with parishes to

See *St. Matthew's* Page 2



Seniors support, including drop-ins, is an important part of what St. Matthew's House is engaged in.

Phot: Contributed by St. Matthew's House

St. Matthew's House Is Actively Serving the Community

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

share more information about the important work of our organization in the coming months. Here are a few highlights:

Seniors Support

St. Matthew's House Seniors Support Services Team is a beacon for vulnerable seniors (55+) living in Hamilton. Our seniors crisis worker is on the job responding to the influx of crises identified through the emergency food program, gleaning issues around food, income, and social supports in order to better understand and address the root cause(s) of each individual's food insecurity. The Seniors in Kitchens team (SinKs) continues the mobile market and food bank program, with its delivery van bringing much needed food, including fresh fruits and vegetables, directly to City Housing Hamilton seniors' buildings in the lower city.

The outreach team builds relationships within neighbourhoods to connect with people either on the verge of becoming homeless, or who are homeless. Isolation can be as dangerous as food shortages and these experienced workers ensure that people who are struggling are seen, respected, and supported.

The HOPES Program is all about eviction prevention for those who are struggling with their current dwellings. Through funding from the Government of Canada via the City of Hamilton, the HOPES Navigators and paralegal support worker work with the Hamilton Community Legal Clinic to offer clients guidance and support to face challenges such as income support, tax support, affidavits, and liaising with the Landlord and Tenant Board. A seniors system navigator added to the roster allows enhanced care for clients. Hoarding issues are dealt with through intensive clean ups funded through generous supporters as the Hamilton Community Foundation.

The ground is about to break for 412 Barton construction, a property adjacent to St. Matthew's House child care centre on Barton that will be converted to 15 deeply affordable apartments. The suites will house homeless or near-homeless people, as well as low-income seniors who identify as



Photo: Contributed by St. Matthew's House

women, Indigenous peoples and other racialized groups including Black Canadians and people with disabilities. Residents will be calling 412 Barton home in early 2024.

Childcare Services

Now offering three locations for our youngest citizens to have supportive and engaging care, St. Matthew's House offers a full range of programs services for infants, toddlers, preschoolers, before/after school care and summer camps. At a time when many childcare programs are experiencing low enrolment, our programs have flourished. We attribute this success to the dedication and commitment of every member of the childcare team, who have worked tirelessly to ensure children have the opportunity to learn and grow in a safe and loving environment. We have enrolled in the Canada Wide Early Learning and Child Care Program to ensure that parents' child care fees are lowered over the next two years to about \$12 per day.

Our relationship with the City of Hamilton's leadership in all our work has been very strong and we truly appreciate the support of many staff members working at the city.

The partnership with Green Cities Foundation has resulted in a refreshed and enhanced children's playground at St. Matthew's House, with raised planting beds, hardscaping, and beautiful trees and flowers that will shade and beautify our corner of the world on

Barton Street. The Children's Centre is expanded and now offers more locations for our youngest citizens to have supportive and engaging care. Most importantly, we are fostering community through all of these accomplishments.

Adopt-A-Family/Senior Holiday Program

The Adopt-A-Family/Senior Holiday program, one of St. Matthew House's most popular programs, matches low-income families and seniors with individual sponsors, families or groups looking for a meaningful way to give back to their community during the holiday season. In 2022 we are proud to share that a total of 2,271 individuals were supported, including 421 Families and 426 Seniors, and we are excited and hopeful for what the 2023 program season will bring!

We are also looking forward to launching our new name and branding for this great initiative. Stay tuned as we share more details about its new name and image "Holiday Hope", coming this Fall.

The need throughout our community is urgent, and is increasing every year. St Matthew's House will continue to grow to address these important issues in our community through thoughtful and strategic expansion, and the commitment of its donors, partners, team members and volunteers.

Our team would welcome the opportunity to meet with parishes, to share more informa-

tion about the work and initiatives currently underway at St. Matthew's House. If you would be interested in scheduling a presentation to discuss in more detail, please reach out to me at apayne@stmatthewshouse.ca.

To learn more, please visit us at www.stmatthewshouse.ca

Alicia Payne is the coordinator of stewardship, fundraising, and volunteers at St. Matthew's House.

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Success and Failure in the Church

It's Hard to Talk About



THE REVEREND CANON MARTHA TATARNIC

I was having a conversation with a group of thoughtful and creative clergy recently. “It can be hard to talk about success in the church,” one of my colleagues noted with some dismay. “Nobody wants to hear about it.”

I could feel my stomach clench as she said these words. We had been talking and sharing in our group about the amazing and successful things that people were doing in their churches. Their accounts were hopeful, exciting, inspiring. And also, that clench in the pit of my stomach affirmed in a visceral way for me the truth of her words. It's hard to talk about success in church ministry, because it's hard to hear about it.

I try to be someone who follows my gut. When I have that kind of reaction in my stomach, I know I need to pay attention. I can relate to my colleague's comment. I have been part of a lot of interesting and life-giving initiatives and some traditional markers of growth in congregational development, and she is right, it can be lonely and quiet when those things are happening. Colleagues who are struggling don't want to hear about the challenges, excitements, and discoveries of growth. It can feel like bragging when we insist on naming success out loud.

But here's the thing: I have also tried things that don't work, or don't work the way I had hoped and dreamed. The last few years have been challenging and rebuilding has been slow. And all of this is hard to talk about too. “Failure,” however we may experience that in ministry, is lonely and quiet as well.

Silence in these matters is not okay. The world is changing so fast, and the place of the church in that world is on shaky and constantly shifting ground as a result. We can take very little for granted in terms of what parts of our institutional life

from being able to do so? What is the clench in my stomach—and I would hazard to guess in others' stomachs as well—what is it about?

It's about competition. And competition is not unrelated to the sweep of secularism that is so changing the church's place in society. A recent review in the *Atlantic Daily* of the new book, *The Great DeChurching*, analyzes the reasons for the ongoing exodus of North Americans from organized religion and reaches an interesting conclusion. Most haven't left because their beliefs have changed or because of

and uncertain of how to live in community with other people.”

This societal change has a significant shrinking effect on the slice of the population interested in any way in participating in organized religion. It has an effect across churches as we essentially compete for a smaller and smaller share of the “market.” And it certainly has an effect on our being able to lay down our defenses to be able to talk honestly about what is working and what isn't in our individual faith communities.

I find that the best way of addressing that clench in my

listen. We can learn. We can be honest. We can lean into the gift of community and the collective wisdom God has entrusted to us to share. We can lean into the gift of community as the life-giving response that it is to a world that has been left “lonely, anxious, uncertain” and driven to maximize individual accomplishment over and against common life.

The lie of thinking that we are alone in either our success or failure is in imagining that what I do, or what an individual community does, is just about me or it. None of us is meant to



Photo: Unsplash/Andrew Seaman

are going to exist going forward. We know that Christ builds the church, that the Body of Christ will continue to be alive and that the community of faith will be renewed by the hand of the living God. But we don't know exactly what that is going to look like. We can't be faithful to the Spirit's work or to the church that we have been asked to steward without being a people ready to learn. And we can't learn without talking about both success and failure.

So what is holding us back

harm they have experienced at the hands of the church.

“The book suggests that the defining problem driving out most people who leave is... just how American life works in the 21st century. Contemporary America simply isn't set up to promote mutuality, care, or common life. Rather, it is designed to maximize individual accomplishment as defined by professional and financial success.”

It is instead, the article claims, that we have “adopted a way of life that has left us lonely, anxious,

stomach is to acknowledge that it's there. The squeeze is declared in a significant way by realizing why I feel this way, that I'm not alone, and that we can collectively make a choice not to stay silent. We can support and learn from one another by being clear about the context in which we find ourselves: that secularism is on the rise, institutional religion is on the decline, and we are caught up in societal changes that are not within our control. And also, we are not left powerless or orphaned. We can

figure this out alone, and none of it is ultimately about building up any individual unit—person or congregation. It's about us and what God is doing in us, what God is doing in us for the sake of the world. It matters that we listen to one another so that we can be faithful to that calling and identity. It's in the gift of community that we can unclench our stomachs, talk about what it really going on, and bring our successes and our failures into the light.



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**CALLED TO LIFE
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Living Better on Less Program Grows with Community Partners



Participants and instructors celebrate with a community meal

Photo: John Dennis

LIAM CAMERON

The Church of the Apostles' Living Better on Less Program is expanding with support from community partners, launching a new program targeting seniors in partnership with the Elliott Community Centre and a program for youth with Wyndham House. This is being completed through a partnership with the Guelph Tool Library to deliver the programming.

Living Better on Less coordinator John Dennis explained that "these strategic partnerships are helping us deliver the program to new audiences and address specific needs in the community. The program has always had a diverse group of participants such as new moms, recent retirees, neuro-divergent adults living in group homes, and those simply curious about the program. The current focus is to target specific audiences and address their needs."

The Living Better on Less Program consists of a series of six free sessions that teach different skills to participants about having less of an environmental impact and living on a fixed budget. The program puts an emphasis on personal growth and assessment. Each participant takes a different approach to the material to best suit their circumstances. They are led by a facilitator who brings in guest speakers and works with the participants in small groups and classroom settings.

The church received grant funding to create a Living Better on Less Program for Seniors and to teach two sessions. The

program will cover such diverse topics as health issues for seniors, fraud awareness, coping with loss, and cognitive decline. The church has partnered with the Elliott Community Centre who will host the program and provide us with free space to undertake the sessions. The program is supported by a New Horizons for Seniors grant. The goal will be to deliver two sessions in October and January 2024.

Robin Smart, public education coordinator with the Alzheimer Society Waterloo Wellington wrote in a letter of support for the program stating that the "Living Better on Less Program will deliver opportunities that encourage greater social inclusion, volunteerism, and community engagement for seniors. The senior program will encourage seniors to connect and link with peers while engaging in creative learning opportunities."

The Living Better on Less Program for Youth is funded through a United Way Community Recovery Services Fund. This program is being delivered in partnership with Wyndham House, a local youth shelter. The program will have a focus on unhoused youth and the struggles that they face in Guelph. The program will feature lessons guiding participants on healthy eating, mental well-being, employment, and finances. The youth program will run sessions in November 2023 and February 2024 at the Wyndham House Hub located in downtown Guelph.

Living Better on Less coordinator John Dennis added that "the program will create a

Youth Advisory Committee of four people who will consult on the curriculum and mentor other participants in the classes. These mentors will receive an honorarium for their work and an opportunity for employment through the Guelph Tool Library's Circular Store."

The Living Better on Less Program began in 2008 as an outreach program of the Church of the Apostles in response to Bishop Michael Bird's call for churches in the diocese to respond to the housing crisis and high unemployment. The program was created by Ann Chidwick and has run over 25 sessions with about 650 participants since its inception. Living Better on Less has also run successful pop-up sessions with an additional 500 participants at community events.

Ann Chidwick stated that the "Living Better on Less program is for everyone. We cannot continue to live an extravagant lifestyle without having further impact on our world environment. Expanding the programme to seniors and youth is a natural growth, particularly when they will be held in those groups' present communities. To learn new ways to economize and live more simply will increase feelings of well being, Living Better on Less. As Christians we need to live this call."

Liam Cameron was the community outreach assistant at the Church of the Apostles funded through a Canada Summers Jobs Grant.

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Reaching Beyond Our Borders

The Church of Our Saviour the Redeemer sends aids to Refugee Camp in Bangladesh

BEV GROOMBRIDGE

We are blessed to have Francis Tabu and his family as members of The Church of Our Saviour The Redeemer in Stoney Creek. Francis is currently working with refugees in Bangladesh and he mentioned that the children there are without toys and books. Recently Francis travelled back to Bangladesh and volunteered to deliver a suitcase full of toys and books to an aid organization working with the children in the camps in support of their learning.

Francis shared with us a little about the history of the area and their struggles as follows. "In August 2017, following violent military crackdown in Rhakine state, Myanmar; about 700,000 Rohingya people were forcibly displaced into neighbouring Cox's Bazar district of Bangladesh. Now one of the largest refugee camps in the world, where living conditions are tough due to overcrowding, limited access to livelihood, 95% of families depend solely on humanitarian assistance to meet their basic needs. This too is dwindling. In May 2023, their

food rations were reduced to barely \$8 per person per month. Access to education is available through makeshift learning centres that lack many of the basics seen in developed settings. Donations of toys and school materials from the members of the church were given to one of the child friendly centres in Camp 21 that hosts about 17,000

Rohingya refugees. " Our parish knitting group has joined with the knitting group at Amica in Stoney Creek and together this cheery group of woman have knitted a beautiful variety of baby clothes and blankets. These ladies, knowing of the hardships endured by the families there, have donated 50 pounds of baby blankets and

clothes. These knitted goods will accompany Francis on his next trip to Bangladesh. As our kitting coordinator Jean Jaggard has said, "There is so much need in the world it is an honour to help in any way we can." Sometimes it takes something like hearing from someone who has actually visited and lived in these refugee camps for us to

realize how very blessed we are to live here in Canada. Often it is so very easy for us to read about the conditions in other parts of the world and then quickly forget them. We are thankful that Francis has shared his experiences with us and that we were able to respond in some small way.



Kutupalong Refugee camp in the Cox's Bazar district of Bangladesh. It is the largest refugee camp in the world.

Photo: Maaz Hussain/VOA



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Returning Home from the Holy Land

ANNA TAVAKOLI

From May 1–12, 2023, I embarked on a sacred journey to the Holy Land alongside 24 fellow pilgrims from the Anglican Church of Canada. Our leaders possessed extensive knowledge and experience, and they crafted an itinerary that allowed us to explore the Holy Land from various angles: cultural, spiritual, political, emotional, physical, and more. A remarkable aspect of this pilgrimage was the opportunity to have the primate, Archbishop Linda Nicholls, accompany us. It was truly inspiring to listen to her sermon on Jesus calming the storm while we sat on a boat in the sea of Galilee.

Like other pilgrims, we visited the customary holy sites like the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and the Church of the Nativity, however, it was in walking the streets of Nazareth and Jerusalem, taking a boat ride on the Sea of Galilee, and partaking in the Eucharist at St. George's Cathedral in Jerusalem that I predominantly felt the presence of Jesus. These moments were particularly profound and filled with spiritual significance.

This experience greatly strengthened my faith as I witnessed the incredible work carried out by the Anglican



Young Anglican Holy Land Pilgrims from across Canada gather for a photo before their flight. Anna Tavakoli, Adam McNeil, and MacKenzie Colbourne-Tennant represented the Diocese of Niagara.

Photo: Contributed by Anna Tavakoli

and Lutheran Churches. One example is the Princess Basma Centre in Jerusalem, where children with disabilities from the West Bank and Gaza receive free

assessments and treatments. I was also moved by the Episcopal Technological and Vocational Training Centre, which equips high school students with skills

in various programs such as hospitality, culinary, and technology, coupled with invaluable career counselling upon graduation. The scripture passage, "My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth" (1 John 3:18), resonated deeply with me during this journey. It reminded me that as Christians, our commitment to the Lord is expressed through serving His people.

Therefore, engaging in conversations with the locals, learning about their lives in the Holy Land, and sharing their stories with my parish became a meaningful way for me to live out my faith and serve God.

From our interactions with the Christians residing in the Holy Land, they refer to themselves as "living stones." This term stems from the fact that their ancestors were present in the land when the Holy Spirit descended during Pentecost, and they were the first to honour the sacred places—the very stones—where Jesus walked and endured His suffering until His crucifixion. Now that I am back in Canada and reflecting on these words, I have come to realize the importance of shar-

ing their stories with the rest of the world, particularly considering their relatively small population in the Holy Land and the challenges they face as Palestinians.

During our time in Jerusalem, particularly in the evenings, we engaged in conversations, dances, and songs with Arab Christian young adults. Through these interactions, we discovered numerous similarities despite the common assumptions held by many. The moments we shared while singing Christian songs in both English and Arabic will forever hold a special place in my heart.

Lastly, I am deeply grateful for this experience, and I recognize that it would not have been possible for me to embark on this pilgrimage without the support of the Lois Freeman Wilson grant and the Diocese of Niagara. I will continue to share my journey with others, particularly the young members of my parish and I hope that in the coming years, they too may have the chance to enrich their faith and experience personal growth, both in their professional pursuits and personal lives.



St. George's Cathedral in Jerusalem where tour participants participated in the Eucharist.

Photo: Wikimedia Commons

Celebrating gardens at St. James, Fergus

Norman Manning, Lorraine Manning, and Christine Whitehead, receive a Climate Justice Niagara Garden Certificate from member, Bruce Mackenzie, St. George's, Guelph. Norman and Lorraine were a moving force behind the establishment of the garden, while Christine looked after the garden plants for many years.

Photos: Contributed by St. James, Fergus



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St. Alban the Martyr's Native Plant Library

PAM SHELDON

St. Alban's in Acton has always been guided by a sense of community in all its endeavours and that is what was accomplished when the Greening for God Committee decided to plant a rain garden full of pollinators and native plants to enhance all God's creatures.

"All God's Creatures Pollinator Garden" reads the sign that not only welcomes people strolling by but is a haven for birds, bees, butterflies, and beneficial insects. It is a beautiful and calming place to just sit and reflect. When one of the many volunteers, while toiling in the garden, happened to mention one day "Wouldn't it be nice if we had a native plant library?" that random thought became the inspiration for the committee to make it happen. A local wood artist who built our beautiful tree-limbed bench was approached with the idea and he agreed to build us a small weather-secure library for the public to access as they were walking by. The library,

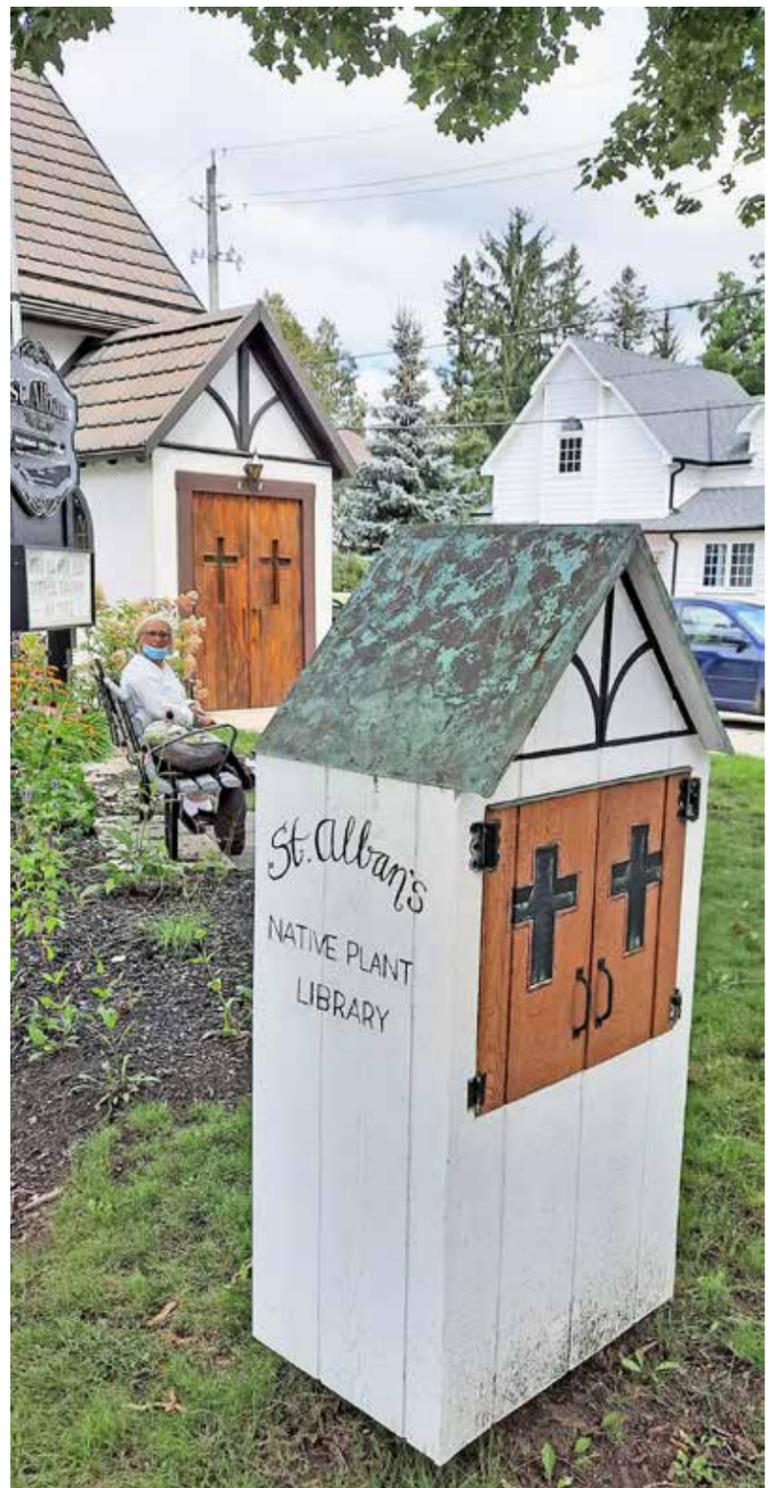
a replica of St. Alban's beautiful front entrance, has been a huge hit with the community as it has become a source of information for why native plants? What are beneficial insects? Why are bees so important? What is a rain garden?

Through the generosity of Credit Valley Conservation and Landscape Ontario, and just by simply making copies of interesting articles that Committee members find, we are able to keep the little library stocked with brochures, articles, small books, and anything to do with environmentally sensitive gardening. For instance, one brochure entitled *Plant Me Instead* teaches people what to plant instead of an invasive species, like goutweed. Then there is the article in the library about 10 beneficial insects. For many people they've never thought about insects being beneficial—but many are. Not every bug is bad—learn about the good guys.

Over three summer seasons of volunteer work we filled our native garden with

beautiful Echinacea (cone-flower), Rudbeckia (black-eyed susan), Liatris (gayfeather), Sparkleberry, Blue-flag Iris, Monarda (bee balm), Marsh Marigold, and many other native plants. We had help and assistance with a grant from Credit Valley Conservation and expertise from horticulturalist Sean James, for which we will always be grateful. Our worker bees (volunteers) ranged from 14-years-old (they learned all about ants) to three strong young men who did all the heavy digging, and numerous members of St. Alban's, who love to garden. It truly was, and is, a labour of love for nature and for our community. Perhaps our native garden and library will act as an inspiration for many community members to think about the natural environment when planning their gardens and choosing their plants. We know it will make all the birds, bees, butterflies, and beneficial insects very happy.

After all, we are "All God's Creatures".



Above: The native plant library, built to resemble the church's entrance, houses information resources on native plant gardening and its benefits, available to the public.

Left: The pollinator garden at St. Alban's, Acton.

Left bottom: The tree limb bench provides a view of the pollinator garden.

Photos: contributed by St. Alban's.



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“THE APOSTLES GATHERED AROUND JESUS AND TOLD HIM ALL THEY HAD DONE AND TAUGHT. HE SAID TO THEM, “COME AWAY TO A DESERTED PLACE ALL BY YOURSELVES AND REST AWHILE. FOR MANY WERE COMING AND GOING, AND THEY HAD NO LEISURE TIME EVEN TO EAT.” (MARK 6:30-31)

In our highly stressed, busy society it is important that we maintain this picture of Jesus in our minds. He knew when it was time to withdraw to seek a new spiritual landscape and to correct his perspective. There were many occasions where he needed to turn his back on harsh reality and seek rest. Flight might have been prudent, but he chose prayerful withdrawal for replenishment and re-creation. Time and time again, he withdrew from his teaching, his healing and his preaching. He left behind those who wanted to share a meal with him, those who wanted to touch him and those who just wanted to put their hand on the hem of his robes.

Most of us are tightly scheduled burdened with all manner of obligations so that the idea of walking away, simply withdrawing from the demands of the alleged “real” world seems almost impossible. Jesus shows us a rhythm of going out and coming back, of departure and return almost like the regular

life giving rhythm of breathing.

Did Jesus shirk his responsibilities? Was he chastised for dereliction of duty? In his gospel, Mark tells of how at sundown, all who were sick or were possessed with demons were brought to his door. He cured many of the sick, and then in the morning while it was still dark, he got up, went to a deserted place and there he prayed. The disciples then have to hunt him down and tell him everyone is looking for him. Instead of returning to the town, he tells his disciples “Let us move on to a neighbouring town.” We might well ask what gave Jesus the right to walk away from all those people who needed him. He did not do this out of indifference or being hard hearted, but he did it out of the need to renew, refresh and redirect himself.

For us to go away by ourselves to rest and escape the “everyday” is not an exercise in selfishness. It is however, a practice of self-care that is highly beneficial for our well-being. How many times

do we protest; I don’t have time; I’m too busy; I’ve got a deadline to meet. These should not be used as excuses to prevent self healing because they will always be there. They are a part of our life. Whether we go away for a short time, or long time everything will still be there waiting for us when we come back.

Just like Jesus, our need to refresh and renew is always placed squarely in the midst of life’s demands and “real life” will be waiting our return. Our retreat away is a limited time of engagement from the world’s concerns to make possible a deeper engagement with God and our own best self.

A retreat is time away from our workaday surroundings. We might picture an ancient monastery or place of great natural

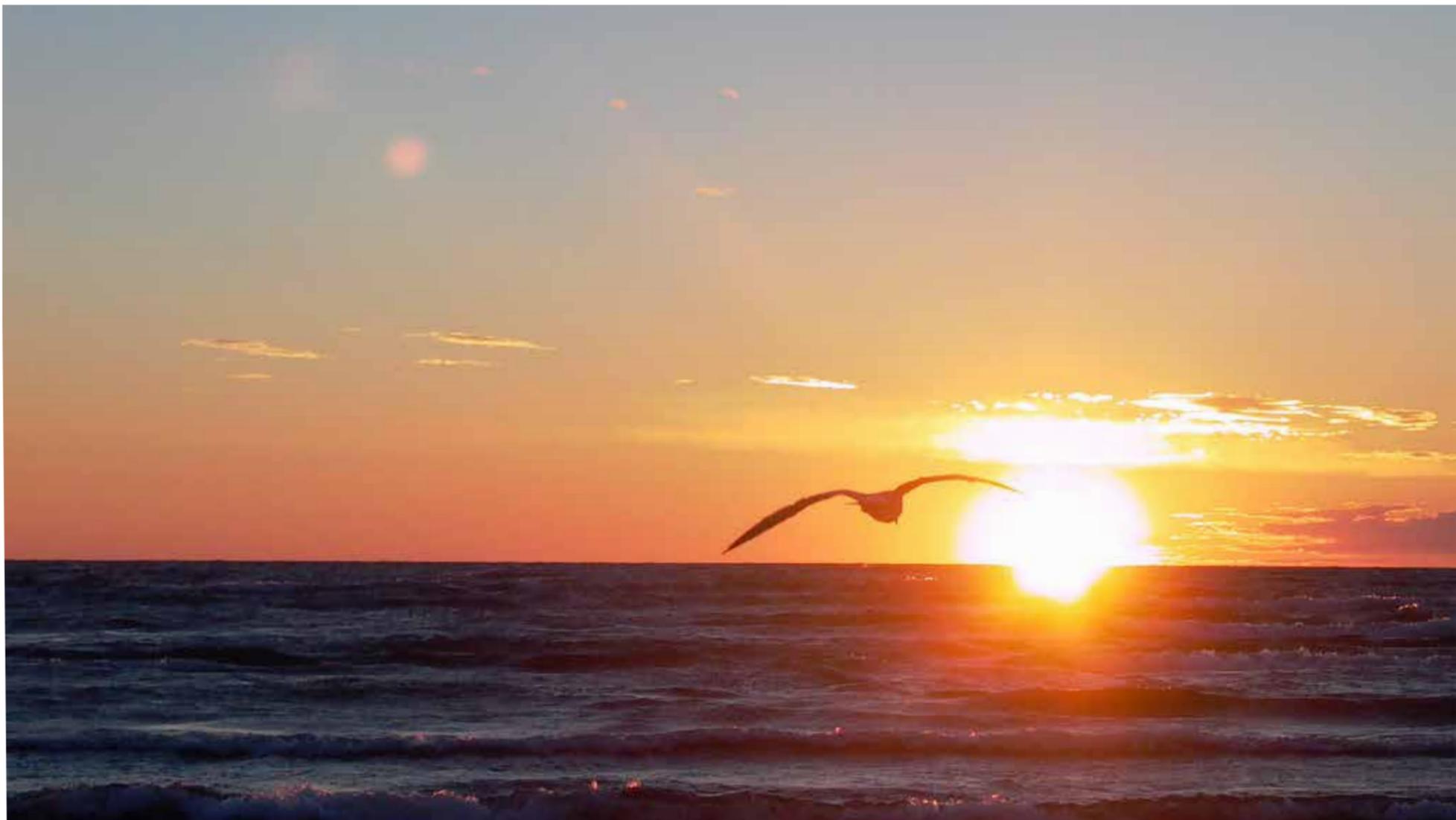
beauty. We are more attentive to prayerfulness when the environment is filled with reminders to that lead us to prayerfulness. Silence, art, music and worship by a religious community are all things we look for in a retreat. Worship within a religious community can be so nourishing, that prayer soaks into the walls of the chapel and floats in the air. But this type of retreat is not for everyone. We need to learn how to pray, how to be silent and how to let the power of God be absorbed into our very being.

So, just as Jesus did, we need to remove ourselves from everything that surrounds us, walk away, find a quiet place for an hour, a day, a week, or however long we need, to refresh, recreate and nourish our souls. When we come back, everything is still

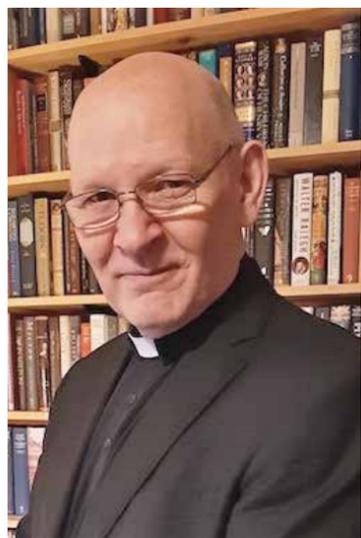
there; we just see it in a different light. The spreadsheet you were working on suddenly falls into place or timetabling our children’s sports schedule suddenly becomes more manageable. Nothing changed while you were away, but when you return you are more able to face each new challenge, as well as the old ones with a renewed spirit.

The next time everything is getting you down and you say, “I’m running away!” then do it. You don’t have to go far, but the journey back will bring new meaning and a renewed energy to you.

“Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest awhile.”



Facing Grief



THE REVEREND MICHAEL COREN

I've been ordained less than four years but have conducted almost fifty funerals. When I tell people that they look at me in disbelief. No doubt, most of us in the clerical life could tell a similar story. It's always a privilege, and always a challenge. There's also such a roaring paradox involved, because the one inevitability in life is the one that we're least prepared for.

We're frightened, and that's entirely understandable. Frightened of losing those we love, of our own departure, our own death. Of not being here. Anybody who claims to have all of the answers is best avoided, because there simply aren't solutions to every puzzle. Indeed, faith itself is a dialogue.

In my experience, Jews and Irish Catholics cope with it the best. Sitting Shiva provides time for reflection and support. And food. Not a bad combination. The wake injects a sense of joy, or something approaching it, into a time soaked in pain. Remembering the good, the fun, the love in the person who has died.

I always recommend a short book called *A Grief Observed*, by C.S. Lewis, and a more recent one, *The Madness of Grief*, by English priest and public figure Richard Coles. In the former, Lewis writes of the death of his wife, "No one ever told me that grief felt so like fear. I am not afraid, but the sensation is like

being afraid. The same fluttering in the stomach, the same restlessness, the yawning. I keep on swallowing."

Richard is equally profound but also funny. "After David died, there was a woman at the hospital who had been widowed, too. She said, 'You're going to be mad, for a while. People will never be as nice to you again as they are now, so milk it for all you can.'"

Humour, believe it or not, does help. Honesty, however, is vital. Being compassionate and being patronizing aren't the same thing, and just because someone is grieving doesn't mean they've suddenly become less intelligent or aware. Never talk down to one who is in pain. Equality at a time of suffering can work wonders.

As a Christian, I genuinely believe that this is only the land of shadows, and real life hasn't begun yet. But I couch those words in the reality of the room, and the worst thing a priest can do is to offer platitudes. Can I rationalise pain and loss? Not

really. Bad things happen to good people. What I can and do say is that in my mind, in my faith, Jesus has been there before us, suffered before us, and suffered for us. In a divine leap of solidarity, he felt what we now feel.

The most important thing any of us can do is simply to be present. Be there. Listen rather than talk, accept the anger, and don't try to explain what can't be explained, certainly when wounds are bleeding raw and open.

Also, consider the context. Those mourning the death of elderly parents are often mar-

ried and have families around them, and there's something natural and in a way more acceptable about it all. Those who have lost spouses, at any age, are obviously in a much darker place. I lack the wit and wisdom to fully describe the tearing, the ripping, of hearts that occurs when a parent loses a child in such a way. In every case, the best I can do is to emphasise how this was nobody's fault—not the person who died, and not those who loved them.

Relish life's every moment, remind those close to you of your love, forgive until it hurts, and try to ignore the pointless noise that so surrounds us and concentrate on the important things. The pain? It never goes but does diminish, does become manageable. For what it's worth, I give you my word. And to those fellow priests, deacons, and lay people who have taught me so much about all this and continue to do so, thank you and bless you.



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In other words

Matthew's Party: Banquets and the Kingdom of God

**JOHN BOWEN**

I had known Matt since high school, and we were still pretty good buddies. In fact, these days, we had a kind of partnership in our work. I have a kind of—what shall I call it?—an import/export business, and Matt worked for Revenue Canada.

And there were times when Revenue Canada was sending me rather large bills, and I would give Matt a call, and let's just say the bill would go down. Then, one day Matt would find a nice new BMW standing in his driveway. You know what I'm saying?

Well, not long ago I got a phone call from Matt. I thought it might be trouble, but he says, "No, no, nothing like that. It's just that I'm having a party tonight and you absolutely have to come."

"Matt," I say, "what's all this about?"

"Well, OK," he says, "There is something up—and I could hear the excitement creeping into his voice—there's someone I want you to meet at this party."

"Great, great," I say, "a business contact?" (Matt's sometimes given me great contacts.)

"No, not this time. Well, I don't want to say too much, but you know this Jesus character, the prophet carpenter from up north, the one whose been all over the front pages the past couple of weeks?

"Yeah yeah." (Should I be feeling worried? Had Matt got religion?) "Is he your secret

guest?"

"You got it."

"But Matt, what does this mean? Why Jesus? Trust me, you don't want your picture all over the papers."

"Simon, he says, "I'm not even sure what it means. So don't ask any more questions, OK? Just be there."

"OK," I replied.

That evening, I showed up around 9 o'clock. It was a nice spring evening, and the house looked as if it was pretty full. I squeezed through the crowds, helped myself to a plateful of chicken and potato salad and a cold beer, and began to look for Matt.

He wasn't difficult to spot. He was working the crowd with his usual enthusiasm.

"Simon," he shouted across the room. "How ya doing?"

"Matt, what is all this about", I asked again.

He gave what I can only call a giggle, and Matt was not the giggling type. (I told you he worked for Revenue Canada, right?) "You know, I'm not sure I know myself. All I know is that this morning, I was working at my desk, when there was a knock at the door, and this Jesus guy walked in. Of course, I knew who he was from the photos.

"Before I could think what to say (after all, what do you say when a prophet barges into your office?), he said, "Matt, I want you to come with me. Right now. Come on!" And there was just something about him—his manner, his self-confidence, his winsomeness—that I just thought, I don't have to stay here a minute longer. I'm going to go. Why not?

So I went. We walked outside, he introduced me to his friends—John and Peter and the rest—they're around somewhere—and I've been hanging out with them all day, just discussing God and

stuff. He's an amazing teacher, you know, Simon. But I don't want to tell you any more. Just come with me.

He grabbed my elbow and steered me through onto the deck at the back of the house. Even that was pretty crowded. Then he whispered in my ear, "That's him," and pointed. There in the corner was a youngish kind of guy, maybe 30, long hair in a ponytail, a glass of wine in one hand and gesturing with a chicken leg in the other, deep in conversation with a small group.

"Come on", said Matt, "I want to introduce you." And before I could protest, he did.

"Jesus, this is Simon, a very old friend of mine; Simon, this is Jesus from Nazareth." Jesus gave a big grin, and shook my hand. "So how's business, Simon?" Now that was not a question I wanted to answer in detail, specially to a religious guy, so I just said, "Fine, fine. Er, how's your business?"

Fortunately, before we could get any further, Matt tried to get everyone's attention.

"Folks, folks, can you listen up for a moment?"

Gradually silence fell.

"First, I want to thank you all for coming tonight. I know it was short notice, and I thank you for making the effort. The reason we're doing this, I think you all know, is to honour Jesus from Nazareth. Since you've all heard about him, but probably never met him, I've asked Jesus to say a few words to us."

There was a silence that was part curiosity, part embarrassment. A preacher at a party? Like a skunk at a wedding, I thought to myself. What on earth would he say? We all got ourselves prepared for a sermon. Jesus began.

"Well, first of all I think we should thank Matt for this great party, specially at such short

notice. It's been great, and, Matt, thank you for going to all this trouble."

We clapped politely. Jesus went on.

"You know, parties like this always make me think of the kingdom of God." (Here it comes, I thought.) "There's a kind of life and laughter and good friendship that a party like this brings out that makes me think of heaven." (Well, that's a new angle, I thought.)

I don't know how you think of heaven," he went on. "Maybe for you it's a boring place with everyone dressed in white and looking solemn and playing harps to Victorian hymns all day every day."

"But it's not like that: our Creator wants us to find joy in his world in loving him and in loving each other, in seeking justice and mercy and compassion." (People murmured politely and shuffled their feet.)

"The trouble is," he went on, "not everybody accepts God's invitation to the party. And sometimes those God thought were his best friends are the ones who make the stupidest excuses."

"In fact, God got so ticked off that people just ignored his invitations that he said to his servants, Listen up: just go out into the streets, and grab anyone you can find, and get these seats filled up. I'm not going to waste my banquet. The party is open to anybody, whoever they are. They're all welcome."

"And so, friends, the fact that you're here tonight is a good sign: you are not far from the kingdom of God."

And he stopped and looked around. Well, we didn't know whether to laugh or ask a question or applaud or do something religious like take up an offering.

"Oh," he added, with that grin again: "One more thing: If you

have ears to hear, you'd better listen carefully!"

Well, that seemed to be it.

People began to drift off to get more food and drink, some began discussing what he'd said. I got myself another beer, and as I took the top off, I found Matt at my shoulder:

"Wasn't that great?" he asked.

"What?" I said. "Matt, I don't get it. What was it all about?"

"Isn't obvious?" Matt asked.

"Jesus is inviting us all to be part of God's kingdom, a kind of new family God is creating in this world. It's like a party. The ones who said no to the invitation are the religious folk—you know, the church leaders who've been criticizing him on TV. And the ones who said yes to the invitation were the rest of us—you and me—who always thought church was a waste of time. So he's saying, come to the party, come to the party, God welcomes you to his table. To be honest, I don't get it all, of course, but I think that's what he's saying. It's fantastic."

I guess I'm a bit slow where religion is concerned, but I guess the way Matt put it made some sense. I think of myself as a spiritual kind of guy, though I don't have much time for religion. But if Jesus is saying God is doing something new, something more like a family party where everyone learns to love one another, well, maybe I could get interested after all.

In fact, this Saturday, I think I'm going to go to Gage Park for the day. I hear Jesus is going to be there all day teaching and telling stories, and maybe doing a miracle or two. I can see what Jesus has done for Matt, and I think I should check him out for myself.

Niagara Anglican Deadlines and Submission Guidelines

Upcoming Deadlines:

December – October 27

January – November 24

February – December 29

Submissions:**News, Letters, Reviews**

(books, films, music, theatre)

– 400 words or less

Articles – 600 words or less

Original cartoons or art –

Contact the Editor.

Photos – very large, high resolution (300 ppi), action pictures (people doing something).

Include name of photographer.

Written permission of parent/guardian must be obtained if photo includes a child.

All submissions must include writer's full name and contact information. We reserve the right to edit or refuse submissions.

Questions or information:

Contact the Editor at editor@niagaraanglican.ca

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