

Consecrate Our Lives and Ministries to Thee

A recap of the 151st Synod held online on November 1.

Page **2**



Bishop's Charge

Bishop Susan Bell's address to Synod reflects on a hymn, a vision statement, and a Gospel story.

Page **4**



Order of Niagara Conferred

Highlights of the personal service honoured by the Order of Niagara this fall.

Page **10**



NIAGARA ANGLICAN

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

A section of the Anglican Journal



DECEMBER 2025



Photo: Unsplash/Casey Horner

The Light Shines in the Darkness ...

THE RIGHT REVEREND DR. SUSAN BELL

At Christmas, we proclaim with joy and trembling wonder: "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it." Into a weary, fractured world, Jesus comes—not in might or spectacle, but in the vulnerability of a child. He enters history not from above, but from within—into poverty, political unrest, and social division. And he brings with him light that cannot be extinguished.

We live in times not so unlike that first Christmas. Our world aches with

division—between nations, neighbours, and even within our own hearts. The darkness can feel overwhelming: injustice, isolation, conflict. But it is precisely here that the light of Christ makes its dwelling.

The light Jesus brings is not passive or ornamental. It is active, dynamic, and transformative. It heals what is broken. It exposes what needs changing. And it calls us—boldly and lovingly—into the work of reconciliation.

As the Church, we are invited not merely to admire this light, but to bear it. To be living candles in our communities: comforting the grieving, lifting the lowly,

speaking truth with love, and choosing unity over division. Christmas reminds us that God has not abandoned us to the shadows. He has come among us, and still does—in every act of compassion, in every risk for peace, in every heart turned toward hope.

This Christmas, may we receive the Light of Christ anew—and have the courage to carry it into the world that so desperately needs it.

+ Susan Niagara

Awaiting Advent Hope in a Violent World

THE REVEREND CANON DR. IAN MOBSBY

Advent begins not with glitter or comfort, but with longing. It is the season of deep waiting, of aching expectation for a world in desperate need of restoration and healing. In an age of war, ecological collapse, and social fragmentation, Advent invites us to stand still before the obvious darkness of our time and whisper, holding onto faith no matter how small: God is coming. It is a season that does not deny suffering but dares to proclaim that even in the midst of it, we remember that because of God—love is being born.

Mary's story stands at the heart of this waiting. Her yes to God came in a world far more violent and oppressive than

we sometimes remember. She lived under Roman occupation, in a patriarchal society that held little regard for women's voices or autonomy. Poverty and political instability were the air she breathed. When we sing of her obedience to God, we must not forget her courage. Her hope was not naïve optimism but a radical act of defiance in a world that crushed the powerless. The Magnificat, her song of praise, is a revolutionary cry—declaring the proud scattered, the powerful brought down, and the humble lifted up. It is the voice of one who has glimpsed the coming of divine justice amid human cruelty.

To enter Advent through Mary's eyes is to enter the heart of God's promise of liberation. She embodies the waiting of all

who have longed for a world free from domination and fear. Her hope is not passive; it is active, risky, and rooted in trust that God's mercy will overturn the structures of oppression. The child she carries is the embodiment of that mercy—God taking flesh not in a palace, but in poverty;

not through the powerful, but through the vulnerable. In the Incarnation, heaven bends down to earth, and divinity becomes one with our frailty.

This is the scandal and the wonder of Advent. It proclaims that God does not stand apart from human suffering but enters

into it. The coming of the Christ is not an escape from the world's pain but God's transformation of it from within. In our age of cynicism, when violence feels endless and political systems seem incapable of compassion or fairness, Advent calls us back to the daring hope that love is stronger than death, that mercy will have the last word.

To hold onto this hope is not easy. It demands faith that resists despair and practices that keep the soul awake. The Advent candles are not primarily decorative; they are symbols of defiant light. Each one is a small rebellion against the darkness of our age—of violence against women, of hatred against



Photo: Unsplash/Ümit Bulut

See ADVENT Page 10

Consecrate our Lives and Ministries to Thee

“Hear what the Lord is saying to the Church” was the response to the scripture readings at the 151st Synod of the Diocese of Niagara held via Zoom on November 1, 2025.

It was a fitting response with the Synod’s theme being “Take my life and let it be consecrated, Lord, to thee,” based on the hymn by Frances Ridley Havergal. The Synod brought a deep focus to the way God is calling Anglicans in Niagara to serve in the Church today, examining the ministries, missions, vocations, and formation happening across the diocese, lived out in the diocesan Mission Action Plan (MAP).

After opening prayers and procedures, the bishop delivered her charge to Synod,

“Every year, as I make an accounting of what we’ve been doing in our beloved diocese, I am reminded of the deep faithfulness, resilience, and generosity that live at its heart,” said Bishop Susan Bell. The charge wove together the Synod’s theme, the diocese’s vision statement (Called to Life – Compelled to Love), and a Gospel passage (John 1:35-50) to reflect the Church and the world and the way in which the Spirit is at work.

The bishop pointed to increases in average Sunday attendance, new missional initiatives, and the improvement of the diocese’s financial position as signs that “something is happening” and that the Spirit is on the move across the diocese.

It’s almost like the Spirit is out ahead of us, beckoning us to take baby steps – “come on, you can do it,” observed the bishop. “And you know, we can. We can do it. With faith. And hope. And love.”

Canons Named

During her charge, Bishop Susan Bell announced, with Dean Tim Dobbin, two new honorary canons of Christ’s Church Cathedral: Cheryl Barker, rector of St. George’s in Georgetown.

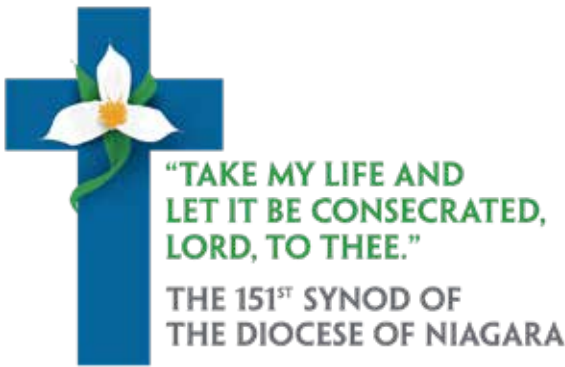
And Will Alakas, rector of St. Columba’s, St. Catharines. “Both have distinguished themselves by their love for their parishes and by their support of the diocese as a whole.”

A Missional Moment

Reconvening after a short break, those gathered were introduced to the designated diocesan

missions by Canon Ian Mobsby, community missionary for the diocese. Through the course of a video which can be found on the diocesan YouTube channel, delegates heard about the ministries of 5 diocesan missions and missional initiatives:

- All Saints Mission - reaches out to the de-churched and unchurched in their central Hamilton neighbourhood.
- The Migrant Farm Workers Mission - supports the spiri-



tual, food, and personal needs of workers from Mexico, South America, and the Caribbean who are in the Niagara region seasonally and for whom English is a second language.

- Mission in Acts Mission - engages with new-to-Canada Mandarin-speaking migrants in the Oakville area.
- St. Luke’s Community - journeys with many de-churched millennials who are exploring contemplative and catholic spirituality in Hamilton’s North End.
- The Hamilton Well is a budding missional initiative based on James Street North, reaching out to the spiritual-but-not-religious and other seekers through contemplative Christian spirituality.

Exploring Mixed Ecology

Canon Ian Mobsby and Dr. Emily Hill then provided for members of synod an overview of the Mixed Ecology Model of Ministry, sharing with members how parishes thrive when multiple congregational expressions coexist and support one another, focusing on different worship styles, languages, cultures and methods of connection.

2026 Budget

Canon Ellie Clitheroe, chair of the Diocesan Budget Planning Committee and Christine Morrow then introduced the 2026 budget.

Canon Clitheroe and Morrow were pleased to share that the



Above: Archdeacon Bill Mous, Bishop Susan Bell and Chancellor Greg Tweney pose for the camera before the start of Synod.

Photo: Contributed by Diocese of Niagara

Below: A slide from the presentation on diocesan missions by Canon Ian Mobsby.



budget represents “a picture of increasing financial health of the diocese,” forecasting an operating surplus before capital items.

The focus for the budget this year is on missions and overall cohesive direction for the diocese, with \$4 million being invested into missions in Niagara. The budget will prioritize, investing in the Diocesan Mission Action Plan, piloting the St. Brigid’s Community, enhancing the sustainability of our diocesan missions, and providing ongoing support for the missions, parishes and chaplaincies, the care and upkeep of Cathedral Place.

“We budget based on an equitable formula which tracks with the highs and lows of the parish experience,” reported Morrow. “The increased revenue of nearly \$300,000 in 2026 is a reflection of our ongoing recovery from the pandemic era.”

Canon Clitheroe added, “We are on an excellent trajectory, moving from a significant deficit this year to a modest surplus in 2026.” The budget was approved

by members.

Synod also approved several housekeeping canon changes, including updates to vestry procedures and communication expectations.

Report on the 44th General Synod

Adam MacNeil (lay member), Paige Keller (youth member) and Archdeacon Terry Holub (clergy member) delivered a report on the national meeting of the Anglican Church of Canada held in the Diocese of Huron this past summer.

“One of the amazing things about General Synod is how it reveals the remarkable diversity in our Church,” says MacNeil. He then highlighted a motion he moved to request an increase in the number of youth delegates eligible to serve on the Council of General Synod, and a motion he seconded to endorse the creation of a National Youth Council. Both motions passed.

Keller also noted the unique opportunity to see the diversity in the National Church.

“Naturally, we didn’t always agree, and sometimes our opinions were quite different,” she says. “That was new for me and really eye-opening. But what stood out was how our conversations always remained respectful, comfortable, and deeply meaningful.”

Keller also announced that she and Bishop Susan were elected to represent the Province of Ontario on the Council of General Synod.

Other Business

Regional representatives for the five regions were then elected to Synod Council for the 2026 to 2027 term: The Reverend Rob Towler (Brock); The Reverend Victor Kischak (Greater Wellington); Susan Little (Hamilton-Haldimand); Mark Young (Lincoln); and Amy Collard (Trafalgar).

A resolution was also carried that the diocese extend warm greetings and congratulations to the United Church of Canada on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of their formative Union and to the Presbyterian Church in Canada on the occasion of their 150th anniversary.

Anniversary Year Conclusion

Before closing in prayer, there was a final missional moment—a compelling and inspiring anniversary video reflection which highlighted the diversity of the diocese, showcasing the growth of the diocese, its parishes highlighting diocesan growth and outreach, featuring reflections from assistant curates and emphasizing the formation of new clergy. The video can be found on the diocesan YouTube channel.

The bishop gave her assent to all the actions of Synod, before Canon Naomi Kabugi led members through closing prayers and a litany of thanks. Bishop Susan Bell then offered a final blessing, and as the Synod adjourned, members departed with the joyful hope of faith in the future.



Visio Divina – Finding Spiritual Depth Through Art

THE REVEREND CANON
STUART PIKE

We humans, for the most part, have monkey minds. Actually, picture a group of monkeys, eyes darting everywhere, seeing everything and chattering to each other about what they see. Hands always in motion. Our minds are often like that, making mental commentary from one end of the day to its close, never finding stillness. And yet, our chatter is mostly surface-level stuff, mundane, not often getting to depth.

But there is within us also a great need to find depth. This deep need is what led me to explore various forms of stillness and meditation several decades ago, finally leading me to the daily practice of Centring Prayer. You see, in a busy, noisy world, with an even “noisier” chattering mind, you simply have to find a way to quiet the chatter and the movement and enter into stillness to experience the depth at your centre, where the still small voice of the Holy Spirit may be experienced.

Centring Prayer leads you into the stillness using an apophatic method – the way of the mystic, St John of the Cross. That is the letting go of everything – image, thinking, analytical faculties – just letting it all go and entering the silent, still and dark void and, there, finding that great void to be full of God!

But there is another way in too: the kataphatic method – the way of the mystic, St. Teresa of Ávila. The opening up to sense, the use of image and perhaps scent and sound, and movement to take you away from the chattering analysis of your mind into another place of beauty and stillness, also where the Holy Spirit may speak.

Although the apophatic method has been my go-to for decades, I have also been interested lately in how a kataphatic



The Annunciation by Henry Ossawa Tanner

Disturbing? Puzzling? Sit with these thoughts for five or ten minutes. Perhaps write some notes down.

Meditatio – silently gaze upon the painting again. Remembering what you saw in the first step: does this image spark some memories for you? Does it convey another image or sound or scent from your memories? Is there a hymn or a piece of music that arises in you? What is coming from your past or recent experience that is speaking to you through this?

Oratio – Given what has arisen in the first two steps, form a prayer that you want to offer to God at this moment. Think of people, situations, your family, friends and yourself.

Contemplatio – Leave everything from the first three steps behind and simply enter stillness and silence and rest in the presence of God. When thoughts assail you, re-enter stillness by focusing simply on your breathing or silently saying a simple sacred one or two-syllable word of your choosing to symbolize your letting go of all thought and returning to the presence of God. Set a timer for 5 to 15 minutes from this last step of entering into silence. At the end of the silence, say a simple prayer of gratefulness.

method might be the beginning of the stilling of the mind and enabling one to enter a deeper apophatic silence.

The method called Visio Divina does this, using sight, employing the faculties of the mind: spatial analysis, memory – sometimes related to sounds and other senses, to bring one to a new depth.

Like its cousin, Lectio Divina, Visio Divina has four stages:

1. **Visio** – silently beholding an image and noting what is standing out for you. Is it the colour or the shape of an object in the image? Is there something that is drawing your attention?
2. **Meditatio** – this is in the sense of “meditating upon” using memory of other images, places, sounds, smells, your lived experience that is surfacing as you see the image.
3. **Oratio** – bringing what is surfacing in you to prayer, using your thinking faculties. And finally, the last step:
4. **Contemplatio** – this is where the shift comes from kataphatic to apophatic. In this

step, you leave all of your thinking and imagining aside and you simply rest in God in silence and stillness.

I thought for this December edition of the Niagara Anglican, I would like to do a simple guidance in Visio Divina using a very Advent subject. I have chosen the work of art by the great Henry Ossawa Tanner called “The Annunciation.”

Tanner created this painting in 1898, and it is part of the collection of the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Tanner was an American Artist who went to Paris to further his study of art and just basically stayed there for the rest of his life, except for some travelling. He was also the first Black American artist to gain international acclaim – especially in European circles. This painting was presented to the 1898 Paris Salon and met with resounding accolades.

Having studied art history in Florence for a couple of months, I have met thousands of Renaissance paintings of the Annunciation. In most of these, Mary and the angel are robed in

beautiful apparel and often in immaculate surroundings. I love Tanner’s Annunciation because Mary is presented as a very humble girl in a very humble room. And the angel, far from being a beautiful human figure, is, instead, a column of light.

As you prepare this Advent, as you hear this Annunciation Gospel and you prepare for Christmas to come, take some time with this painting: see and hear how it speaks to you and leads you to some spiritual depth:

Visio – what grabs your attention? Mentally name what you are seeing and feeling. Is there something you find comforting?



NIAGARA ANGLICAN

The official publication of the Diocese of Niagara, published 10 times a year from September to June as a supplement to the *Anglican Journal*.

The Diocese of Niagara lies at the western end of Lake Ontario, encompassing the Niagara Peninsula, Hamilton, Halton Region, Guelph and portions of Wellington and Dufferin Counties.

Publisher: Bishop Susan Bell
905-527-1316
bishop@niagaraanglican.ca
Editor: Dani Leitis
editor@niagaraanglican.ca
Advertising: Angela Rush
905-630-0390
niagaraanglican.ads@gmail.com
Proofreader: Wendy Leigh Bell

Art Director/Layout: Craig Fairley
Imagine Creative Communications
Printed by: KT Web Printing Ltd.,
Toronto, ON M6A 1Z6
Mailed by: Elite Bindery and Mailing
Services, Scarborough, ON M1P 5A1
Available online at:
niagaraanglican.news (blog)
niagaraanglican.ca/newspaper (PDF)
Subscriptions: \$15/year.

Submissions:
Submission information and deadlines are printed elsewhere in the paper.
Mailing address:
Cathedral Place
252 James Street North
Hamilton Ontario L8R 2L3

For a complete staff directory and more information, visit the diocesan website: niagaraanglican.ca



ANGLICAN
DIOCESE OF
NIAGARA

**CALLED to LIFE
COMPELLED to LOVE**

Bishop Susan’s Charge to the 151st Synod of the Diocese of Niagara

**DEAR MEMBERS OF SYNOD,
DEAR PEOPLE OF GOD:**

Every year, as I make an accounting of what we’ve been doing in our beloved diocese, I am reminded of the deep faithfulness, resilience, and generosity that live at its heart. From our small-town churches to our largest urban parishes, from our innovative ministries to our quiet acts of compassion, we are all part of something greater than ourselves: a living, breathing body called into life by God’s love and sent into the world to share that love freely and generously.

This year, my accounting includes with three interwoven strands—a hymn, a vision statement, and a Gospel story.



I’m a singer, and so hymnody means a great deal to me. You may have noticed that I always, always thank the directors of music in your parishes. I do that because I am very well aware of the importance of music ministry—and sung prayer. In the great hymn-writer Charles Wesley’s day, folks used to carry round a pocket hymn book as a collection of what they believed. And Wesley’s emphasis on sung prayer was a central feature of a great revival of faith. I like that idea. And so, it wasn’t a stretch to look to a hymn for inspiration for our Synod theme: “Take My Life and Let It Be Consecrated, Lord, to Thee.”

Frances Ridley Havergal’s beautiful hymn, written in 1874, has been sung by countless Christians as a prayer of devotion and offering. It is deceptively simple—but profoundly demanding.

Each verse of the hymn offers up another part of the self: life, hands, voice, silver and gold, intellect, will, heart, and love...

“Take my life and let it be consecrated, Lord, to thee.”
This hymn is about consecra-

tion—about setting something apart for holy use. It’s about recognizing that every breath, every gift, every relationship, every resource, is not our possession, but a trust from God.

But it’s also about joy. Havergal doesn’t write in tones of grim duty, but of delight. She says: “Take my love, my Lord, I pour / at Thy feet its treasure store.” The giving of ourselves to God is the way we become free, because what is offered to Love is transformed by Love.

And so, this hymn is not only a personal prayer—it’s a communal call.

That brings us directly to our diocesan vision statement: “Called to Life – Compelled to Love.”

Those six words encapsulate both the grace and the challenge of Christian discipleship—specifically in Niagara.

To be called to life is to remember that everything begins with God’s initiative. It is God who calls. God who awakens. God who breathes life into dry bones. God who calls us out of the tombs of fear, complacency, and despair and into the light of resurrection life.

We don’t call ourselves. We are called—by name—by the still small voice of love that knows us intimately.

And when we respond to that call, when we bravely say “yes,” we’re set free to live abundantly—not only for ourselves, but for the sake of the world.

And because that divine call is always an act of love, it leads inevitably to the second part: we are compelled to love.

Because love is simply not optional for those who have heard the call of Jesus. It’s the natural overflow of a heart touched by grace.

To be compelled to love is not to be coerced, but to be moved—by compassion, by gratitude, by a recognition of seeing Jesus’ face in every person we meet.

And this vision statement of ours, like Havergal’s hymn, is both personal and corporate. It speaks to the transformation of our own hearts, but also to the renewal of our common life—a diocese that lives its calling and bears witness to God’s love in a time when we are hungry for hope.

John’s Gospel also captures that call and response beautifully.

John the Baptist is standing with two of his disciples. Jesus passes by, and John says simply, “Behold, the Lamb of God.” That short testimony—just five words—changes everything.

The two disciples follow Jesus. He turns and asks the question that still echoes through every generation: “What are you looking for?”

They reply, “Rabbi, where are you staying?”

And Jesus says, “Come and see.”

That invitation—come and see—is the beating heart of discipleship.

Jesus doesn’t begin with dogma or demand. He begins with relationship. He invites them into his life, into his presence, into a shared journey.

They come; they see—and everything changes.



That’s the movement of grace: seeing, being seen, being sent.

That’s what I love most about this Gospel passage [John 1:35-50]: the way Jesus truly sees people. He looks at Simon and says, “You are Simon, son of John. You will be called Cephas.” He looks at Nathaniel and says, “Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit.”

Jesus names them not only as they are, but as they will become: the Rock upon whom the Church will be built and the one who will represent the honest transmission of faith.

Jesus sees not only the present reality, but the divine possibility within each person.

And that, friends, is how we are called to see one another in this diocese: through the lens of God’s generosity and expansive imagination for us; and not through the lens of past limitation, but through the eyes of holy imagination.

To be called to life is to be seen in this way—to be recognized and loved into possibility.

And to be compelled to love is to turn that gaze outward—to see others as Christ sees them:



beloved, gifted, redeemable, capable of transformation, and full of hope.



Now, if we hold these three strands together—Havergal’s hymn, our vision statement, and this Gospel story—a beautiful pattern emerges.

Each calls us to a life of consecration, a life of offering and response.

Jesus’ words, “Come and see,” are another way of saying, “Take your life, and let it be consecrated.”

Come—bring your gifts, your fears, your joys, your questions—and see what God can do with them.

For Havergal, consecration begins with surrender:

“Take my moments and my days, / let them flow in ceaseless praise.”

For us, in this time and place, consecration might mean something like this:

Take our buildings and let them be spaces of welcome.

Take our resources and let them serve your mission.

Take our hearts and let them burn again with holy love.

Consecration isn’t about giving up life; it’s about giving life back to the One who gave it in the first place—and finding, in that giving, the joy of renewal—of being called to life in a changing church.

We are living in a time of enormous change—in the Church and in the world. The landscape of faith is shifting beneath our feet.

We’re generally smaller, budgets are generally tighter, and the world outside our doors is, to be honest, less certain of what

the Church is for in these times.

And yet, I believe this is not a time for hand-wringing, but for deep listening—for hearing again that call to life.

The Spirit is doing a new thing among us. It looks different than before—but that’s kind of the point about renewal—the Spirit is calling us to do new things.

So, as we look ahead—as we dream, plan, and pray for the life of this diocese—what are we discerning from the Spirit’s leading?

Well, I guess the first thing is that the diocesan Mission Action Plan—our MAP—is doing what it’s designed to do: keeping us accountable to our own discernment.

In the convening circular, you can read Dr. Emily Hill’s excellent MAP report. But let me highlight just a few things from it: last year we appointed a faith formation coordinator and by God’s grace—and her hard work, The Reverend Monica Romig-Green has begun a good work among us; resourcing parishes and exploring new avenues of theological and pastoral inquiry. She’s pioneering a new grandparents resource that I’m excited about, that explores discipleship for those who are in this season of life and the transmission of the faith from generation to generation—from grandparent to parent and child. This kind of bespoke ministry is foundational to our growth in these times. Please avail yourselves of Monica’s wisdom and help. Christian education and spiritual engagement are so important.

And on that topic, the Niagara

Continued Page 5

WE ARE HERE FOR YOU, STEP BY STEP!

We pride ourselves on being flexible in our offerings, providing options as diverse as the families we serve.

- Simple Cremation Packages
- Ample Parking
- Pre-Arrangement Services

- Celebration of Life Packages
- Full Service Packages
- Tribute Hall

Circle of Life
CREMATION AND BURIAL CENTRE INC.

100 KING STREET EAST, DUNDAS, ON L9H 1C4
905-628-8558
CIRCLEOFLIFECBC.COM | KARIN@CIRCLEOFLIFECBC.COM

Bishop Susan’s Charge to Synod

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5

School for Missional Leadership strengthens its focus and enrollment every year. We are now in the fourth year of the NSML’s existence and are in a fruitful partnership with the Faculty of Theology at Huron University College. The consolidation of the school is due to the solid work of Sarah Bird, our registrar and Dr. Emily Hill, our parish development missionary. I am deeply grateful to all those in our diocese who have taken a chance and enrolled in a course. Special mention goes to St. Luke’s, Smithville, who have a group taking a course together!

And our social justice engagement has been a steady drum-beat beneath our diocesan life: 2SLGBTQIA+ advocacy continues through the Rainbow Kings and Queens and also in a general posture of support, an emphasis by Climate Justice Niagara on the Communion Forest initiative, education and advocacy about human trafficking and other work that comes under Deirdre Pike’s justice and outreach portfolio are important ways that we stay engaged with the needs of our world. Our MAP is helping us stay focused, vital and motivated to keep bringing all these things into the future.

We’re being called to keep listening for ways to take care of the young people entrusted to us. The mental health crisis we’ve seen in recent years has left us with a desire to provide some spiritual support for our youth who are facing a bunch of things we never had to face growing up. Science shows that spirituality benefits mental health, and spiritual beliefs and practices foster connection and meaning. And of course, we know this—we got there before the scientists!

Again, Sarah Bird has been hard at work resourcing leaders for this ministry. Children, Youth and Family Ministry (CYFM) remains a vital, identity-defining ministry for our diocese. We’re known for it, and Sarah has led this portfolio with great energy and skill. And it’s also for this reason that the idea of a new monastic, contemplative community—St. Brigid’s—primarily aimed at 18- to 35-year-olds but with support from all ages, of course, has taken shape under the guidance of our diocesan community missionary, Canon Ian Mobsby, and a small group of like-minded, Anglicans who

are committed to upholding this focus on young people are supporting this ministry with creativity and generosity.

We’re being called to a renewed and intentional approach to stewardship. It’s about taking care first and foremost of our faith, then taking care of our relationships, then taking care of the vision we have for Christian community and then, and only then, paying attention to money—because that makes the other stuff take concrete shape. The reality is: from faith comes the impulse to love, from love comes the impulse to serve and nurture, and our resources make that care and nurturing possible. It’s not really about money. Money is merely the means by which we procure the things we need to care for the hungry, the naked, and the oppressed. It’s necessary, but it’s not an end in itself. Joining the mission of God is an end in itself.

And it’s clear we’re being called to that mission—by God’s grace, we will have designated 4 missions by the end of the year.

We’re being called to talk about a mixed ecology church. You’ll hear more about both of these movements of the Spirit during our Synod later.

We’re being called to respond in concrete, actionable ways to make the name of Jesus known in feeding the hungry and clothing the naked. So many of our parishes have heard this call and responded. ... I feel very proud of the ways in which our diocese is responding to human need.

We’re being called to mission-shape our leadership: The NSML is, of course, all about this and the ripple effect is wonderful to behold. And the 150th Anniversary Diocesan Curacy Fund aims to do this as well. As it stands today, we have enough funds to allow me to support the stipend of half a curate every year. We are making progress, and I am so deeply grateful to those who have donated and raised money for this crucial fund. Now there’s a way to go, so please keep the fund in your hearts and minds if you’re thinking of supporting leadership in our diocese. It’s truly demonstrating faith in the future as we shape our leaders for the Church for long years to come.

I could go on telling you what we’re being called to, but this, members of Synod, is just some

of what it means to be called to life—and to trust that God has much for us to do yet. This is what it is to be compelled to love—that’s our challenge and our gift in this moment. ...

Through these acts, the Gospel is being proclaimed, lives are still being touched, and hope is still being born.

And while the world seems to pull apart and the rhetoric of fear and division grows louder every day, the Church’s witness must be unmistakable. We must proclaim with harmony and hope that we are people of love.

Love that listens.
Love that welcomes.
Love that serves.
Love that is abundant.
Love that speaks truth in compassion.

To be compelled to love is to move beyond comfort. It means loving those who may never love us back. It means standing with the vulnerable, welcoming the stranger, and seeking peace even when it costs us something.

This, too, is consecration—offering our hearts for the healing of the world.

None of this work is ours alone. It is the Spirit’s work in us.

Just as Jesus called those first disciples not one by one into solitude, but into community, so we are called together—as the Body of Christ in Niagara.

Our ministries differ, but our mission is one. We are knit together by baptismal grace, strengthened by the Eucharist, sustained by prayer, and sent out in service of God’s mission of love.

When we gather around the table of Christ, we are reminded that consecration is not a one-time act, but a continual rhythm: receiving, blessing, breaking, giving.



In John’s Gospel, when Jesus calls Philip, Philip immediately goes to find Nathanael. He doesn’t have all the answers; he simply says, “Come and see.”

That’s our call too.
We don’t have to have everything figured out. We just have to be willing to invite—to point others toward the One who gives life—and crucially, to listen along the way for where God wants us to go next—and next—and next. We are always being beckoned onward by the Spirit. That’s the

life of faith: to go forward to meet Christ, not perfectly, but faithfully.

That’s the space we’re in—and we use words like missional and mixed ecology to describe the process of recapturing a sense of adventure about our faith, where we listen for what we think we hear God is saying: we try something and we evaluate how we’ve been able to live the Gospel. If it is of God, it will flourish. That’s the pattern of being faithful – and I hope, once this way of being church is firmly in our bloodstream, that we can also dwell in a sense of joy about it as well.

You see, we’re coming through a stressful time ...

But things are changing. You remember last year that I shared with you some statistics about the rise in average Sunday attendance, particularly at Easter and Christmas? Good news. This year, I can share with you some more:

Our average Sunday attendance across the diocese grew by 18% year over year and we saw further growth for Easter—a modest 9% increase while our Christmas numbers held steady. ... And we have the first budget since 2019, which is balanced

—not on the back of a sale of property. Our recovery is also reflected in a 10% increase in our DM&M.

Now, folks, that’s a significant improvement in our station.

And all in the context of a gently adventurous spirit and risk-taking in our diocesan missions and ministries, increasing a bit here and a bit there and welcoming things like the maturation of our missions, who are now striving to give back to the diocese the investment we’ve made in them. This is a good development and will, in time, cumulatively make it possible for us to plant more new communities when we are so prompted by the Holy Spirit.

It’s almost like the Spirit is out ahead of us, beckoning us to take baby steps—“come on, you can do it.”

And you know, we can. We can do it. With faith. And hope. And love.

Now look, it doesn’t mean everything is rosy. Not everything has improved—as many of you well know. We still have plenty of challenges—mostly with regard to discipleship—and stewardship as a part of discipleship. And we’re working on that.



ROCKY RIDGE RANCH

Your Place to Connect

905-854-2584

info@rockyridgeranch.org
www.rockyridgeranch.org
10486 5th Line NASS RR#2
Rockwood, ON

- Horseback Riding
- Birthday Parties
- Picnics/Retreats
- Leadership Training
- Chapels
- Summer Camp
- Family Outings
- Swimming
- Hay Rides/Roasts



M.A. Clark & Sons Funeral Home Ltd.

Burial & Cremation Centre

Leslie Clark

Dan Hierlihy

Brad Mellor

John Martin

Renee Mastromatteo

Ph: 905-383-3323

567 Upper Wellington Street,

Fax: 905-383-2168

Hamilton, ON L9A 3P8

Email: clarkandsonsfuneralhome@outlook.com

In other words

Healthy Evangelism: What Does it Look Like? Part 1



JOHN BOWEN

When I have asked groups what images they have of evangelism, the answers I get are almost always negative. Street corner preachers haranguing passers-by, people standing on the street corner giving out their literature, TV evangelists pleading for more money. Almost never do people mention two friends talking about Jesus over coffee, or a group discussing C.S.Lewis’s *Mere Christianity*, or a Christian engineering professor giving a lecture on “Can an engineer be a Christian?” (This one used to happen on an annual basis at the University of Toronto. The answer, in case you are interested, was “Yes”!) Such positive models are out there, and we can learn from them. When we ponder, as many churches do, why more people don’t come to church, one simple answer is that vast numbers of Canadians really have no idea what Christianity is all about, and we are not equipped to tell them. But we can learn, and

watching wholesome models of how to do it is one way to do that. Here are nine of them I have observed or participated in. Let’s start with:

1. Childhood Evangelism

Every Christian has been evangelized. If we are cradle church-goers of whatever tradition and we doubt it, that is only because we don’t remember it happening. We may have a sense of being “religious (or spiritual) by nature,” but that is not the same as being a follower of Jesus. Nobody is born already knowing who Jesus is or what his claims on human life are. Every Christian had to be told by someone. That someone was probably close to us—a parent, a grandparent, a sibling, a minister, a Sunday School teacher—who spoke words which told us stories of Jesus and encouraged us to respond by talking to Jesus and learning to love and follow him. Things were said about Jesus, and to whatever extent we were able, we accepted them as true. If we are tempted to object, “As I child, I didn’t know any better,” I can only reply, “But you are no longer a child, and you have had many years to decide to give up your faith if you wanted—but you haven’t. So the evangelism seems to have been pretty effective, doesn’t it?”



Photo: Unsplash/charlesdeluvio

2. Baptismal Preparation

Any priest who has been involved in preparing candidates for baptism has acted as an evangelist. If you doubt me, have a look at the BAS baptismal service and the questions that the candidate is required to answer. They are pretty radical and challenging. The first three negative questions are about things I will turn away from as a Christian, and to each, the candidate is expected to respond, “I renounce them.” The second three are positive, and speak of accepting “Jesus... as your Saviour,” and obeying him “as your Lord”—very evangelical language! To these, the candidate is expected to reply, “I

do.” The two groups of three are designed to correspond precisely to the old-fashioned words, “repent and believe”—which is, after all, how Jesus followed up his announcement that the Kingdom of God had arrived. By the time a priest or other catechist has explained and discussed all of this, any thoughtful candidate has understood some basic truths of the Christian message and has been challenged to respond. This is pretty gutsy evangelism! We just don’t realize that’s what it is.

3. Discussions of the biography of Jesus

One of the issues I faced when teaching evangelism at Wycliffe

College was what to give students by way of an assignment. Evangelism is not the sort of topic where a purely theoretical assignment would be enough, and yet, what could I ask them to do practically? Preach on the steps of Convocation Hall in the middle of the university? Probably not. In the end, I asked students to find a friend with no church connection and ask if they would be willing to help with a school assignment: to join them for four half-hour discussions of the life of Jesus. I suggested four studies they could use, all from Luke’s Gospel: a miracle, a parable, the passion, and the resurrection. Students were then asked to report on how it went. Almost invariably, the students had a very positive experience and came back elated. Their friends were interested and fascinated by the four studies. Many had never read the stories for themselves, and certainly never discussed them. At least once, when the students got to the end, their friend said, “We can’t stop now!” *In the next part of this series, I will discuss some less familiar forms of evangelism. Examples include a way to link the celebration of Valentine’s Day to church, and the use of a special pack of cards to engage people in direct conversations about spirituality. Stay tuned.*

Save the Date for the 2026 Bishop’s Company Annual Dinner!

HANNAH KELLER

On Thursday, May 28, 2026, Bishop Susan Bell will again welcome members and guests to the Bishop’s Company Annual Dinner at Carmen’s Event Centre in Hamilton. The evening promises to be one of fellowship, food, and fun — all in support of the Bishop’s Company Fund, which provides vital resources for the emergent needs of diocesan leaders. Now in its third year since resuming after the COVID-19 pandemic, the annual dinner continues to grow in both attendance and impact. The 2025 event raised over \$30,000 and featured a pre-dinner reception

with live music, a silent auction, and a compelling on-stage conversation between Bishop Susan and Cynthia Mulligan, veteran journalist from CityNews. The Bishop’s Company is more than just a fundraising initiative — it is a community of committed members who support the Bishop’s Company Endowment Fund. This fund generates discretionary income that allows Bishop Bell to respond quickly and compassionately to emerging needs within the diocese, offering support that traditional funding sources may not immediately cover. Membership contributions and proceeds from the annual dinner make this work possible.



The 2025 Bishop’s Company dinner

Over the years, the dinner has welcomed a distinguished lineup of guest speakers, including the Most Reverend Fred Hiltz, former Primate of the Anglican Church of Canada; the Right Honourable Adrienne Clarkson, former Governor General of Canada; and the late Walter Gretzky, a beloved Canadian

figure and advocate for community service. While full details for the 2026 dinner — including ticket information and guest speakers — will be announced in the new year, members and supporters are encouraged to mark their calendars now for this important annual event.

Those interested in joining the Bishop’s Company, renewing a membership, or getting involved with planning the event are invited to do so. The Bishop’s Company Planning Committee is currently seeking new members to help ensure the dinner’s continued success. Volunteers will play a key role in reaching fundraising goals while crafting an unforgettable evening for attendees. To learn more or to become a member, visit www.niagaraanglican.ca/bishops-company. Those interested in volunteering can contact the registrar, Hannah Keller, at hannah.keller@niagaraanglican.ca or by phone at 905-527-1316, x380.

An Exciting Christmas Adventure

THE REVEREND DR. CANON SHARYN HALL

For many of us, Christmas is about a very special holy child born two thousand years ago. For children today, Christmas is also about a magical visit from a jolly man with a white beard who delivers toys to children all over the world on Christmas Eve. At Christmas, children believe in miracles, but even children can sometimes have their doubts.

A few years ago, there was a movie about a young boy who had serious doubts about Santa Claus. If Santa had visited his house on Christmas Eve, surely he would have heard the sound of silver bells on Santa's sleigh. The movie is called *The Polar Express*; it is based on a children's book of the same name by Chris van Allsburg. This movie was created completely with digital technology. It has been added to the list of Christmas movies



because it is so exciting and because it also has a spiritual message hidden in its story. Like many Christmas stories, *The Polar Express* begins on Christmas Eve. It's one hour before midnight, and the young boy is awakened by the clamour of a massive steam train, which mysteriously stops in front of his house. The conductor tells him that the train is taking boys and girls to the North Pole to see Santa Claus, and he has been chosen to be a passenger. The

boy hesitates. He's not sure there is a Santa Claus, but he decides to get on board to find out.

The journey becomes an exciting adventure as the train races to reach the North Pole by midnight. The animated graphics of the movie are amazingly realistic and a thrill to watch, even for grown-ups. When they reach the North Pole, they discover a one-industry town full of elves who have the production and packaging of toys for every child down to split-second timing. Santa's sleigh with prancing reindeer is brought out in readiness for its around-the-world travels. The long harness on the reindeer has rows of silver bells. The boy can see the bells, but he cannot hear them.

Finally, Santa steps out, and a great cheer goes up from the elves and the children. Suddenly, the boy can hear the bells and what a wonderful sound they make! Santa chooses the boy to

receive the first gift of Christmas, anything he would like to have. He chooses a silver bell.

At one point in his ministry, Jesus said that unless we have faith like a child, we will not see the Kingdom of Heaven. Perhaps he was saying that belief in the possibility of God requires the willingness to accept what cannot be explained. At Christmastime, we hear again the stories of the birth of Jesus, and they have become so familiar that we may forget how miraculous they are. Can we believe that the baby in the manger was both human and the Son of God?

In this technological 21st century, how can we believe that such a supernatural story happened, even if it was 2000 years ago? As we go about our daily lives with the joys and tragedies of human life, we may not wonder about the unseen existence of God, but sometimes we want

to believe in what seems impossible, and we long for hope in a peaceful and kinder world.

When we search our hearts, we are like the boy in the *Polar Express* who wants to believe in Santa Claus and to accept that some of the most important things to believe in are the things you cannot see. As the movie ends and the train stops at the boy's home, the conductor asks for the boy's ticket. In a flurry of flying bits of paper, the conductor punches a message on the ticket: one word: 'believe'.

We cannot see God, and we cannot see the infant in the manger, but we still want to believe. In communion, people come forward to receive a mystery, accepting that somehow this gesture brings them closer to God. We can believe that a child born into poverty and brutal oppression can teach us that compassion, justice and love will survive.

Bishop Susan's Charge to Synod

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 7

But the fact is, something is happening. And in that we must rejoice together.

You know, one of my best friends, when she detects the movement of the Spirit, always says "Aslan is on the move"—a shorthand reference of course to the great lion and Christ figure at the centre of C.S. Lewis' *Chronicles of Narnia*.

So, I think that we can say together that "Aslan is on the move" in Niagara.

Of course, we know that we aren't sent out alone; we're accompanied by the same Spirit who anointed Jesus, the same Spirit who has sustained this diocese for the last 150 years, from generation to generation, and will do so long into the future. As we say in one of our diocesan prayers—we partner with the Holy Spirit.

Together, we are co-creators with God of the kingdom and none of this happens without each other. In that spirit, I want to take a moment now to recognize some leaders in our diocese whose service I want to uphold and lift before us as honorary canons: Cheryl Barker, rector of St. George's in Georgetown and Will Alakas, rector of St. Columba's, St. Catharines. ... Both have distinguished themselves

by their love for their parishes and by their support of the diocese as a whole. ...

So, members of Synod, let our prayer echo Havergal's:

"Take my life, and let it be consecrated, Lord, to Thee." Take our parishes, our missions, and our chaplaincies—their history, their hope, their potential—and consecrate them.

Take our leaders—lay and ordained—and consecrate them. Take our hearts—wounded, joyful, courageous—and consecrate them.

Take this diocese—your Church in Niagara—and make it wholly yours.

Let us be a people who live our calling joyfully and who love generously.

Let us be a diocese that embodies resurrection—called to life, compelled to love, such as we are.

Havergal's hymn sings the same holy melody as Isaiah's "Here am I; send me." Both arise from awe before God's glory, and they lead to the joyful surrender of ourselves for divine purpose. Havergal's hymn translates Isaiah's vision into the language of daily discipleship—offering every heartbeat, every word, every act as worship. God's grace transforms trembling into trust. This is the call of consecration: to see, to hear, and to respond with love, allowing our lives to become God's song.

"Take my life and let it be consecrated, Lord, to Thee."

Called to life.
Compelled to love.
For the sake of the Gospel, and for the healing of the nations.
Thanks be to God. Amen.

This is a condensed version of Bishop Susan's Charge to Synod. The full text can be found at niagaraanglican.ca



ERB GOOD
FAMILY FUNERAL HOME
Exceeding Expectations Since 1946

Kitchener & Waterloo's longest serving, independently owned family funeral home

We're Here For You

24 / 7 / 365

Call Now
(519) 745-8445

Email
contact@erbgood.com

Life Celebration - Burial - Cremation -
Aftercare - Bereavement Support - Green
Funerals and Burials - Personalized Options

THE BRIGHTEST GIFTS SHINE FOREVER



World of Gifts
Alongside Hope
ANGELICAN CHURCH OF CANADA • FALL 2025

Matronrushed to more
In Brockville, alongside Hope is supporting Village Health Works to produce nutritious privilege locally. The privilege package is included with each purchase, oil and other resources and is a life saving tool for creating nutritious meals in children's homes. The Village Health Works privilege package will be made available to a small number of people in the community. www.alongsidehope.org/villagehealthworks

From garden to pantry
The Anglican Church of Canada's Food and Agriculture Unit is inspiring local growers and food security in a new way. The new like garden is a place where you can grow your own food and share it with others. www.alongsidehope.org/garden-to-pantry

5. YOUR GIFT OF \$45 provides a month of support for a child in need.

8. YOUR GIFT OF \$70 provides vegetable seeds and fruit tree seedlings for children's gardens.

10. YOUR GIFT OF \$70 provides equipment and tools for food preservation.

With much to be gained

Find **Alongside Hope's** **World of Gifts** in your **Anglican Journal**, scan the QR code to browse our guide online or visit **alongsidehope.org/worldofgifts**

Don't Complain About the Umpire



**THE REVEREND CANON
MARTHA TATARNIC**

During the Blue Jays' heyday this fall, a friend of mine—normally not interested in baseball—shared a piece of advice she had received about how to contribute meaningfully to the cultural conversation unfolding: “don't complain about the umpire.” There is nothing interesting, in other words, about rehashing what injustices were wrought against our team that brought about any one of their game defeats. There are better things to talk about.

It reminds me of something similar, and surprising, that my

daughter said to me upon the release of Taylor Swift's new album this fall as we began our deep dive into exegeting the cultural anxieties and obsessions that her work always stirs up for fans and haters alike: “Let's just avoid the conversation about how she's treated differently because she's a woman.” It was a surprising statement. I don't know anyone better than my daughter at articulating the feminist call to fight for equality and dignity for all people. Being able to see and name the differences in how people are treated because of gender, race, religion, sexual orientation, or any other signifier, is a foundational step in then calling for justice. But what she was saying was insightful: there are a lot of other interesting things to say about this stellar singer-songwriter and wildly successful superstar.

Complaining about injustice in baseball might feel fun and cathartic, and many people would be of the opinion that someone with Taylor Swift's priv-

ilege has nothing to complain about, even if she is a woman, but there was something in both of these comments that felt relevant to me in another way. I have spent the past few years down the rabbit hole of reading and writing about the English Reformation, and particularly about the role of Queen Anne Boleyn in driving and shaping the English church in its break from Rome. (There will be much more on that topic to come.) I knew that the impact of Anne's religious vision and conviction had been widely overlooked in favour of more obvious tropes for talking about controversial and powerful women (saddled with labels like “whore,” “witch,” and “seductress”). What was revelatory, though, was learning about the other powerful and visionary women by whom she was formed to be her own person of impact. Furthermore, what became clear was that for every woman who ended up on our narrative margins as having made an undeniable

contribution to the changing of history, there were thousands more whose names were never recorded who were agitating, opining, influencing, and making their voices and contributions known in undeniable and substantial ways. The most interesting stories about Anne Boleyn and the English Reformation turned out to be the stories of women helping women, of women's voices infiltrating and shaping the course of history, whether we want to see it or not, of a total dismantling of the fiction that it's only ever been the guys who have done things like form and lead our church.

Jesus wasn't one to spend a lot of time on calling out injustice either. He was too busy bearing witness to God's kingdom, to showing what the world can look like when all are fed and all are valued, to paying attention to the voices of people who don't need to be unmuzzled—they already have something to say—but we certainly do need to do a better job of learning to

listen. It's not to say that the stories of disenfranchisement and oppression weren't happening and didn't need challenging. But also, Jesus was masterful at seeing the strength, faithfulness, wisdom, leadership and beauty of people whose offerings are there, whether we like it or not. And isn't the world so much more blessed when we have the wherewithal to receive those offerings?

I'm not prepared to abandon the usefulness of intelligent conversations about the ways in which injustice against whole groups gets visibly enacted in how people get treated and talked about. But I'm glad for the reminder that there are also astonishing and compelling stories happening right before our eyes. What we need is to learn to see and listen differently. There is a lot to lament about whose contributions have been lost, and there is a lot to be learned about whose contributions were significant and impactful, if we could just start paying attention.

Sharing the Spirit of the Season With Holiday Hope

JANE ALLISON



Each year, St. Matt's Holiday Hope program brings comfort and joy to families with children under 17 and seniors over 55 living in Hamilton's lower city (Wards 1–5). The program connects them with generous sponsors—individuals, families, or groups—who want to make a meaningful difference in their community during the holidays.

For more than 35 years, Holiday Hope has relied on the kindness of parishes, organizations, and individuals who recognize the impact of sharing hope with neighbours in need. Last year alone, the program supported hundreds of local families and seniors through the generosity of sponsors and donors. The ability to continue this important work depends on the ongoing compassion and commitment of people like you.

Through personalized wish lists, each sponsor provides new clothing, toys, household essentials, and grocery gift cards for their matched family or senior. Grocery gift cards help ensure that everyone can enjoy a full and nourishing holiday meal,

especially during a time when most food banks are closed. Emergency appointments are also offered on Christmas Eve for those who were unable to register in advance.

Registration begins in October, when families and older adults share details about their needs for the season. This one-on-one connection allows staff to understand each person's situation and ensure their hampers reflect what will be most meaningful. Sponsors then assemble gifts and items, which are delivered the week before Christmas—bringing both comfort and dignity to the recipients.

The true measure of success for Holiday Hope is simple: that no one who reaches out for help is turned away. Yet, as the cost of living continues to climb, more and more people in our community are struggling to make ends meet. Each donation and sponsorship allows us to reach further and brighten the holidays for those facing

food insecurity, isolation, and financial strain.

Every year, the outpouring of generosity from individuals, families, workplaces, and parishes—including many across the Diocese of Niagara—reminds us of what's possible when a community comes together. From toy drives to team fundraisers, these acts of kindness embody the true spirit of the season. Holiday Hope is also grateful to receive cash donations, as this allows us to purchase more desperately needed gift cards. Families can shop for themselves and their children, with dignity and self-selection.

We are deeply grateful to everyone who contributes to Holiday Hope. Your support helps ensure that every family and senior we serve experiences the warmth and wonder of the holidays.

To learn more or become a sponsor, please visit www.stmatthewshouse.ca/holiday-hope.

It's a new year, a new life...
AT HERITAGE PLACE
and we're feeling good

Visit our Sunshine and Garden Studios

Enjoy Life, Your Way
HERITAGE PLACE RETIREMENT RESIDENCE
A Community of Independent Seniors
4151 Kilmer Drive, Burlington L7M 5A9
Call Astra: 905-315-2580 • www.heritage-place.ca

The Manger and the Rule:

A Benedictine Lens on Christmas

**THE REVEREND DEACON
STEPHEN LA SALLE**

*“I DON’T KNOW WHAT TO SAY,
EXCEPT IT’S CHRISTMAS AND WE’RE
ALL IN MISERY.”
Ellen Griswold in National
Lampoon’s Christmas Vacation.*

In the countdown to Christmas, there is an innate desire in many of us to experience the perfect holiday. We imagine being surrounded by loved ones who all get along, in a perfectly decorated home, sharing a beautifully prepared meal and, of course, exchanging plenty of gifts. Gifts that, we hope, will be received as the “perfect present.”

The movies we watch, the commercials we see and the stories we read all permeate this desire for the perfect Christmas. Yet by the end of Advent, many of us feel the weight of seasonal pressures and long for the peace the angels proclaimed that night in Bethlehem when “a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, ‘Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favour rests.’” (Luke 2:13-14) However, through the

lens of St. Benedict, we can enter more deeply into the mystery of Christmas and allow it to shape our lives not just as we prepare for Advent, but in our everyday lives as well.

Luke writes: “And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.” (Luke 2:6–7)

The birth of Jesus is not just a story from long ago; it is a living reality, one that longs to take flesh in us today. The manger is more than a quaint image on a Christmas card; rather, it is a profound symbol of God’s humility. St. Benedict begins his Rule with a call to humility: “The first step of humility is that a man keeps the fear of God before his eyes and never forgets it.”

At Christmas, we witness this ladder of humility in reverse. God does not wait for us to ascend to Him; He descends to us. In the vulnerability of the Christ Child, we see the divine choosing weakness, poverty, and dependence. The manger becomes a throne of grace, where the King of Kings lies wrapped

in swaddling cloths. This descent into humility sets the tone for how we are called to live.

In the chaos of the first Christmas, we also find a call to stability. Mary and Joseph were afraid. The Shepherds were afraid, too. However, none of them let those fears control them. Benedict teaches: “Do not be daunted immediately by fear and run away from the road that leads to salvation.” Christmas echoes this wisdom. God does not shy away from the messiness of human life; He enters into it. Jesus is born not in a palace, but in a stable. Not in comfort, but in chaos. For us, stability means remaining present to the people and circumstances God has placed in our lives: our families, our communities, our daily responsibilities. Christ is born not in an ideal world, but in the real one.

The gathering at the manger reveals another pillar of Benedictine spirituality: hospitality. Luke tells us that shepherds came to the manger, followed by Magi from distant lands. The first Christmas was a gathering of strangers around Christ. Benedict reminds us: “Let all guests who arrive be received

as Christ.” This is not just monastic advice; it is Gospel truth. Every person we meet carries the image of God.

Christmas calls us to radical hospitality: to welcome Christ in the poor, the lonely, the refugee, the neighbour who annoys us. The manger is not only in Bethlehem, it is in the heart of every person we encounter. The reality is that hospitality means being truly present to others, aware of their needs, and responding with grace. It means welcoming not just strangers, but those close to us, again and again, with forgiveness and love.

Finally, in the quiet of Bethlehem, we encounter the gift of silence. Luke writes: “Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart.” (Luke 2:19) St. Benedict viewed silence as a tool for cultivating humility, self-discipline, and a deeper spiritual life, rather than just a lack of sound. He counselled: “Monks should diligently cultivate silence at all times.” For us, the silence of Bethlehem is not emptiness; it is the silence of awe before the mystery of God-made-man. In our noisy, hurried world, Christmas invites us to cultivate inner stillness.

Turn off the noise, step away from the rush, and simply gaze at the Child. In silence, we hear the angels’ song and let the Word dwell richly within us.

In the closing scene of *National Lampoon’s Christmas Vacation*, Clark Griswold gazes at the Christmas star and realizes the true essence of the season, not bonuses, gifts, turkeys, or trees, but something far deeper. As he tells his children, “See kids, it means something different to everybody. Now I know what it means to me.” His words remind us that the meaning of Christmas is not found in perfection or abundance, but in the quiet recognition of grace breaking into our lives.

Amid the hurried pace of Advent, The Manger and the Rule call us to rediscover that same meaning of Christmas through the Benedictine values of humility, presence, hospitality, and silence. In embracing these virtues, the manger becomes more than a relic of history; it stands as a living sign that God enters the ordinary realities of life, offering peace and transformation.



Rooted and Growing

Celebrating Four Years of the Niagara School for Missional Leadership

SARAH BIRD

Four years ago, the Niagara School for Missional Leadership (NSML) began as a hopeful new venture — a Gospel-focused learning community equipping clergy and lay leaders to respond to God’s mission in the world. Today, NSML stands as a vibrant, reliable, and growing ministry of the Diocese of Niagara, rooted in the Good News of Jesus Christ and flourishing through the Spirit’s work.

This past year has been one of remarkable growth and deepening maturity. With courses posted early, promoted widely, and drawing ever broader attention, NSML saw its highest enrollment yet in 2025: 111 students, including 75 from the Diocese of Niagara. Word of this innovative school is spreading far beyond diocesan borders,

with participants now joining from across Canada, the United States, and even Australia.

What began as a local initiative has become a trusted hub of missional formation, where learning is grounded in both practice and prayer. Many dioceses across Canada now recommend NSML courses for clergy and laity seeking continuing education and gospel-focused missional learning.

Behind the scenes, NSML continues to be guided by a dedicated Steering Committee that

ensures the school’s mission, curriculum, and administration remain aligned. This steady foundation allows NSML to continue flourishing as a community of faithful learners and teachers.

One of the year’s great milestones was the first anniversary of NSML’s partnership with Huron University’s Licentiate in Theology (LTh) Program. This collaboration opens new pathways for theological education: LTh students may take NSML courses for credit, while NSML participants can explore Huron’s offerings as part of their formation journey. The partnership is widening access and building bridges across institutions, expanding opportunities for learners near and far.

Highlights from NSML’s Fourth Year

- A new course, **Theology & Harry Potter**, led by The Rev.

Victor Kischak, invited students to explore faith, imagination, and theology through the beloved literary series.

- The Rev. Dr. Rob Jones (Penn State University) joined the faculty to teach the core course **Christian Foundations**, re-enriching NSML’s growing roster of expert instructors.
- Core offerings such as **Missional Preaching**, **Reimagining Church**, **Engaging the Community**, and **Adaptive Leadership** continued to draw strong enrollments and lively engagement.
- The Curriculum Committee is developing fresh and responsive new courses, drawing on student feedback and the insights of teacher-practitioners.
- Preparations are underway for a refreshed NSML website, designed to make the school’s

offerings more accessible and visually engaging for a growing global audience.

Marking four years of faithful growth, NSML stands as a vital embodiment of the diocesan missional action plan: igniting and strengthening faith, reimagining culture, and prioritizing justice through accessible, relevant, and Christ-centered learning. The Niagara School for Missional Leadership stands as a sign of the Spirit’s work among us, equipping the Church to love, serve, and bear witness to the kingdom of God.

Here’s to another year of missional growth, grace, and Gospel-centered learning!

To learn more about the Niagara School for Missional Leadership and or upcoming classes please visit: nsml.ca or email registrar@nsml.ca



Order of Niagara Honours Vital Ministry of Laity

Across two services this past November, 54 laity were inducted by Bishop Susan Bell into the Order of Niagara.

For 25 years, the Order of Niagara has served as a meaningful way to honour the vital ministries of laity who show faithful dedication, making substantial contributions to ministry and communities.

Clergy across the diocese nominate members of their parish or mission who have given of themselves, their time, talents, and service to their parishes, the diocese, their communities, and the wider Church. The bishop may also select laity to appoint to the order.

Members of the order are awarded a medalion which they are invited to wear to diocesan services and events, and when the bishop visits their parish. They also earn the O.N. letters in their title after their name.

Below are just a few examples of the extraordinary service that was recognized in November.

Trafalgar Region

WINSTON TINGLIN
ST. CHRISTOPHER'S,
BURLINGTON



Winston Tinglin has been an active member of St. Christopher's for many years, serving as a warden, property chair, a member of the communications and stewardship teams, and as a choir member. Winston has served the diocese as a member of Synod Council, FAC, and as an Anti-Racism training facilitator. Working in government and then as CEO at United Way Halton & Hamilton, Winston has made significant contributions to community engagement projects and to strengthening the non-profit sector across the region. These contributions included service as interim executive director at St. Matthew's House. A gifted man of deep faith, Winston embodies the values of the Order of Niagara.

JANE ELPHICK
ST. SIMON'S, OAKVILLE



An active member of St. Simon's for more than 40 years, Jane led or assisted in organizing many fundraisers, cabarets and dances. She has been a leader in many parish outreach initiatives and partnerships, including summer barbecues and Christmas toy drives with Front Line Outreach, the Oakville Interfaith Food Drive, and dinners at Kerr Street Mission. For 25 years, with her husband Ted, she has bought groceries for the school breakfast program at Montclair School. She was one of the founders of the Altruists of Oakville, which raised more than a million dollars for Oakville charities.

Greater Wellington

TAMMY RUTHERFORD
ST. JAMES, FERGUS



Tammy Rutherford is faithful and spirit-filled, offering wise and meaningful contributions to the life of St. James. As a lay reader and server, she embodies the text, bringing a sense of sacredness to each moment of worship. Her presence helps the congregation enter into the mystery of worship with reverence and grace, as she speaks to and welcomes the divine into the midst. Beyond the sanctuary, Tammy nurtures community in tangible ways. She coordinates the use of the community garden plots on the St. James property, ensuring that what grows there is more than produce—it is connection, care, and shared purpose. As rector's warden, Tammy brings invaluable gifts of discernment, leader-

ship, and steady commitment. Her service reflects a deep faith and a wholehearted dedication to the flourishing of the parish.

Hamilton-Haldimand

MARLINE SARJEANT
ST. JAMES, DUNDAS



Marline Sarjeant approaches life with infectious joy and humour and is a key leader at St. James and in the wider community. Aside from the breadth of committees and projects Marline is involved with at St. James, including refugee settlement, children's ministry, parish council, and the Holiday House Tour, Marline gives back through track and field coaching, helping with the athletic development of children through the CANUSA games and Special Olympics; all while nurturing a household and managing a business career. Professionalism, patience, and Christ-like compassion exemplify Marline.

Brock

NICOLE EBERT
ST. JAMES & ST. BRENDAN,
PORT COLBORNE



Nicole Ebert is tireless as the coordinator of Food with Friends, St. James & St. Brendan's community meal program, ensuring smooth collaboration among teams from five area churches. She also leads her parish's team with dedication. Nicole is a driving force behind the Blessing Box, a no-questions-asked food and necessities distribution point. She is well known for organizing garage sales that support both Food

with Friends and other causes. Additionally, Nicole is active in the social & fundraising committee and the Port Colborne Garden Club. Her leadership has made Port Colborne a kinder and more vibrant community.

Lincoln

BARBARA DAVIDSON
CHURCH OF THE
TRANSFIGURATION, ST.
CATHARINES

Barbara Davidson is one of the founding members of the parish and holds the distinction of being its first female warden. She has been actively involved in every aspect of church life, from leadership and worship to parish events and groups. She is a member and was treasurer of the Wednesday Morning Group, which organizes receptions and dinners. For over 25 years,



she served as a team leader for the breakfast program at St. George's. Beyond the church, Barbara also volunteered with the St. Catharines Hospital Auxiliary and Community Care. Her lifelong faithfulness and service stand as a powerful example of dedication and generosity. And this year, she celebrates her 100th birthday—a remarkable milestone for a truly remarkable person.

Happy 100th Birthday, Barbara!

Advent

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

strangers, of racism, homophobia and of indifference to the poor. When we light them, we align ourselves with Mary's courage and her vision of divine justice. We declare that love is coming, even when the evidence says otherwise.

This is not sentimental piety. It is the deep spiritual freedom of those who know that God's love cannot be defeated. Advent reminds us that hope is not a feeling but a discipline, forged in prayer, silence, and compassion. It is the contemplative gaze that can hold both the world's wounds and God's promise in the same heart. The Incarnation we await is not only a historical event but a continual unfolding - the Word becoming flesh again and again in every act of mercy, every choice for peace, every moment of kindness, every heart that says yes to love.

Mary reminds us that the Church, too, is called to her way of humility. In her trust and vulnerability, she shows us what it means to live the values of the Beatitudes—to be poor in spirit, merciful, pure in heart, and peacemakers in a world that prizes control and self-interest. Advent challenges us to let go of the need to manage outcomes or to expect God to work on our

terms. Instead, we are invited to serve God where we are — in the context of our own neighbourhoods, among those who struggle, hope, and seek meaning alongside us. The Incarnation begins not in grand plans or perfect systems but in ordinary lives open to grace, where love quietly takes flesh in acts of compassion and faithfulness.

In such a world as ours, Advent faith might seem foolish. Yet perhaps this is exactly the kind of hope we need: one that stands against despair with tenderness, one that believes God is still at work in hidden places. Mary's song still echoes through the centuries, reminding us that God's promise is not undone by human cruelty. The Christ we await is not a distant saviour but Emmanuel—the soon-to-be God with us, God among us, God within us.

So, we wait, not with fear, but with holy expectancy. We wait for the birth of love that no empire, no violence, no hatred can destroy. We wait for the God who comes to dwell in our own humanity, to liberate us from fear and to set us free for love. In this waiting lies our deepest Advent prayer: Come, Lord Jesus—come and make all things new.

It's the Trying That Matters: A Life Lived in Love



THE REVEREND MICHAEL COREN

Forty years ago, in London, England, I attended morning services at a rather grand church in the middle of the city. 8 am gatherings tend to attract a diverse group: tourists, business people on the way to work, devout locals and, truth be told, eccentrics and street people. One regular was an older woman whom we knew as Elsie, but nobody was sure if that was actually her name. She'd arrive seconds before the service began and rush out as soon as it was over. She always carried a plastic bag bulging with goodness knows what, wore the same heavy crimson coat whatever the weather, and danced a little jig when the priest consecrated the host. Elsie was as much a fixture as the crucifix behind the altar.

Then, one Christmas morning, she wasn't there. Christmas Day services aren't always well-attended because people come on Christmas Eve. But not Elsie. Every day, rain, snow, or sun. At the end of the service, the priest asked us to remain for a moment, and he then told us that Elsie had died in the early hours. The funeral was announced, and we were all invited.

I went along not because I knew the woman beyond the occasional smile but because I assumed hardly anybody would be there. It was packed. I recognized some of the morning regulars but not the hundred or

so other mourners, from every background imaginable. It was only after the funeral that I discovered Elsie's story. How this child of a wealthy family had lived in a tiny apartment and spent all of her inheritance helping people in need, how she spent her days walking around the heart of one of the most prosperous cities in the world, feeding people on the street, chatting to them and—most importantly—listening to them. How she'd made herself smaller so they could be larger, given her entire life to others. She'd suffered with chronic pain most of her adult years, but told her priest she was happy and that her only wish was to die on Christmas Day, the time we celebrate the birth of her saviour. Her wish had been granted.

She'd led a Christian life, and one that I could never come close to replicating. But it's the trying, not the failing, that matters. And knowing what Christ, Christianity, and Christmas genuinely mean. It's Jesus, of course. But who was he, and what did his life mean?

He was Jewish, the child of a poor family living under occupation, and born in an era when life was tenuous and tough. Also born the Son of God. If true, and I'm convinced that it is, it means



Photo: unsplash/charlesdeluvio

that the creator of the universe took human form to show solidarity with humanity and took that form in the most vulnerable and dependent way possible. Not a warlord, not a monarch, not a billionaire, but a baby in a family struggling to survive. How then can any Christian not try to emulate this divine embrace of the poor, rejected, marginalized, and oppressed? The answer is that they can't, at least not if they're serious about it all.

We can argue about theology, history, and translation all day long, but the central point, the quintessential command, of the life that would be led by the baby born 2,000 years ago is that we have to love God with all of our heart, soul, and mind, and love our neighbours as ourselves. Love even our ungrateful, rude, difficult, violent, nasty neighbours as ourselves.

The baby whose birth we celebrate became a man who proposed a new and sparkling paradigm, a new relationship between people, a new way of being, living, and doing. What he also told us was that individual transformation was possible and vital and that we're all capable of it. The phrase "born again" is overused and often wrongly used, but it mustn't be dismissed. Consider Ebenezer Scrooge in one of the greatest books ever written about Christmas. He becomes "as good a friend and as good a man, as the good old city knew, or any other good old city, town, or borough, in the good old world." But also, "Some people laughed to see the alteration in him, but he let them laugh." Let the mockers and the cynics do their thing. It's always been thus, and if anybody understood the human capacity to doubt and hate, it was Jesus, whose death on a cross saw the temporary triumph of darkness and despair.

The world is as divided and bloody as it's ever been, and in

some ways, the potential for pain and terror is greater than ever. That makes Christmas and all for which it stands not less but more relevant. The Christian faith, the philosophy of Christmas, isn't naïve or childish, and a mature understanding of the Gospels should lead us to know precisely how difficult life can be. As a priest, I see this almost every day. But if we surrender the fight for justice, equality,

peace, hope and love, we fail God and fail that baby whose birth changed everything. In my better moments, that reality washes over me and makes me complete. If I forget or if I feel sorry for myself, I think of Elsie. She knew what it was all about. Oh, how she knew.



Make a Smart Investment, choose Pollard

Pollard offers great windows and doors of exceptional value. With over 75 years of Canadian manufacturing, you can trust Pollard for expert advice and professional installation.



Call **1.800.585.5561**
POLLARDWINDOWS.COM

I chose Pollard for my home.
SCOTT MCGILLIVRAY
HGTV HOST & REAL ESTATE EXPERT

RECEIVE ADDITIONAL 5% OFF WITH AD





MARTINDALE PLACE
A CHRISTIAN RETIREMENT COMMUNITY

INDEPENDENT SENIOR LIVING
Life Lease & Monthly Rentals with Enhanced Services

Martindale Place is a community of choice for Seniors where Christian values and excellence are celebrated



Niagara Anglican Deadlines and Submission Guidelines

Upcoming Deadlines: February – December 12 March – January 19 April – February 16	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.
Submissions: News, Letters, Reviews (books, films, music, theatre) – 400 words or less Articles – 600 words or less	Questions or information: Contact the Editor at editor@niagaraanglican.ca	

Contact us @ (905) 988-9414
or accommodations@martindaleplace.com
1128 Vansickle Road North, St. Catharines
MartindalePlace.com | facebook.com/MartindalePlace

The Holly Bears a Berry

THE REVEREND ANDREW RAMPTON

Each year, as the end of December approaches, we see the tension between two Christmases begin to rise. There is the Christian Christmas, about the birth of Jesus and the twelve days that begin on December 25. Then there is the secular Christmas, which has snowmen, polar bears, and both of these, strangely, often drinking Coca-Cola.

This splitting of Christmas has given rise to campaigns to “reclaim” Christmas as an exclusively Christian celebration. “Keep Christ in Christmas” and “Jesus is the reason for the season” being two popular slogans. (I am disappointed to report that I have not yet seen a “Keep the Hallows in Halloween” campaign to reclaim that occasion as the Vigil of All Saints Day.)

It is easy, when we think of Christian Christmas, to get lost in the lovely images so common now. A glowing, adoring Virgin Mary gazing at her perfect son. Quiet, protective St. Joseph looking on from a safe distance. Some remarkably clean and sedate sheep, cattle, perhaps a donkey. The whole season takes on a placid, harmonious, solemn joy punctuated with sweet

carols. The truth is that Christmas, like all of our seasons, has more layers than may first seem. Even in the joy of our celebrations at the birth of our Saviour, there are reminders of what is to come in his life. Some carols remind of this in their lyrics, even when sung to joyful, dancing tunes. The Holly Bears a Berry, a traditional Cornish Christmas carol (which is also sometimes sung in Passiontide) includes a verse which says, “Now the holly bears a berry, as blood is it red, then trust we our Saviour who rose from the dead.”

The blood referenced is, of course, the blood of Jesus, shed at his crucifixion. We are reminded that Jesus was born for a life that would include his murder. And that, for many Christians, to be a follower of Jesus means to risk sharing that fate. The calendar of the Western Church has, for centuries, reminded its faithful of this possibility by following Christmas Day immediately with three feasts of martyrs, each mirroring aspects of Jesus’ own death.

On December 26, the church remembers St. Stephen the Protomartyr, a martyr in both will and deed. In chapters 6 and 7 of the Acts of the Apostles, we hear the story of St. Stephen,



Photo: Unsplash/Anne Drotleff

a deacon, who is arrested and tried. In his trial, he offers a powerful testimony of his faith that Jesus is the Messiah, the fulfillment of the law. St. Stephen knows that his words anger those trying him and, when he finishes speaking, he is dragged out of the city and stoned to death. For his unwavering commitment to the gospel, he shares the fate of Jesus: to be killed by those who cannot receive the good news that has changed his own life.

On December 27, the church remembers St. John the Apostle, Evangelist, and, by tradition, the Divine who receives the Revelation. St. John is a martyr in will but not in deed. He sets out to share the good news of Jesus and, like the other apostles, gathers a significant community of believers. His work eventually draws the notice of Roman officials, who are most unhappy

that he is continuing the project of the Galilean they had tried to rid themselves of. John is eventually arrested and goes to Rome for what he believes will be his own martyrdom. By the miraculous intervention of God, he survives every attempt the Romans make to kill him. Exasperated, the authorities exile him to the island of Patmos, where he is to spend the rest of his days. In spite of his willingness to be a martyr in the likeness of Jesus, God has other plans.

Finally, on December 28, the church remembers the Holy Innocents. This day is sometimes called Childermas. The Holy Innocents are martyrs not in will but in deed; the infants of Bethlehem killed by the fearful Herod’s order (Matthew 2:16-18). This day is, for many, the most difficult of the three Christmas martyr feasts to reckon with. Children murdered by those in

power, not because of anything they had done, but because of who they might have been or who they might have become. This day is a powerful and sobering reminder of the lengths to which corrupt power will go to preserve itself. The Holy Innocents also has a long association as a day of remembrance for parents who have lived to see their own children die, sharing the sorrow of the parents of Bethlehem and of Mary, years later, at the foot of the Cross.

These three feasts may seem like a very strange or even inappropriate way to celebrate the early days of Christmastide. They are certainly heavy days to commemorate and may bring to mind the funeral rites—in the midst of life we are in death—more readily than angels singing on high. But, beyond the immediate sadness at the details of their stories, they remind us of the pattern and promise that God revealed so perfectly in the life of Jesus. A pattern and promise we recall most loudly at Christmas: In the great joy of the arrival of our Saviour, at his death upon the Cross on Good Friday, and in the joys and sorrows of our own lives, even if they come to martyrdom, God is with us. Thanks be to God.

Starting Fresh: Spiritual Resolutions for a Faith-Filled 2026

THE REV. MONICA ROMIG GREEN

2026 is almost here. Can you believe it? As a new year approaches, our minds often cast forward to imagine how this year could be better than the one before. Some of us take this opportunity to make a fresh start and commit ourselves to improving our lives in areas that have needed our attention. Making a resolution can be a helpful way to kick off the year with intentionality and focus.

If you are thinking of making a New Year’s Resolution for 2026, have you considered deepening your spiritual life? If that interests you, here are three simple options that could have a positive impact on your life and your relationship with God.

Praying Daily

What would your year look like if you committed to deep-

ening your prayer life? The Anglican Church has a long and beautiful tradition of daily prayer called the Daily Office, which provides liturgies for both Morning and Evening Prayer to be prayed alone or with others.

An excellent resource to help you get started in praying daily is *Pray Without Ceasing*. Published by the Anglican Church of Canada in 2024, this version of the Daily Office is easy to follow, with heartfelt prayers that change to match each liturgical season. Hard copies are available for purchase at Gilmore Global, and for those who prefer to use a computer, tablet or phone, a PDF is available free online at anglican.ca/resources/pray-without-ceasing-morning-and-evening-prayer. To use *Pray Without Ceasing*, all one needs in addition to the prayer book is a Bible for the daily readings and the Lectionary that outlines

the readings for each day. The Lectionary is also available for free online at lectionary.anglican.ca or as a hardcopy book called McCausland’s Order for Divine Service, also available at Gilmore Global.

Reading the Bible Daily

In my work as faith formation coordinator, I often hear from people who have a desire to become more familiar with the Bible. One of the ways to do this is to follow a daily Bible reading plan. BibleGateway has several free reading plans on its website at biblegateway.com/reading-plans. The plans vary in range and approach, from readings from the Old and New Testaments each day to reading through the Bible chronologically or from start to finish. You can read the Bible directly from their website in a number of different translations or simply use the plan to read from your own



Photo: Unsplash/Tim Mossholder

Bible. They even have a daily audio Bible for those who prefer to listen rather than read.

There are also several free apps that you can access on your tablet or phone that are also helpful for reading the Bible, such as YouVersion Holy Bible and Olive Tree Bible.

If you already have developed a habit of Bible reading, perhaps you want to dig a little deeper theologically. Theologians from the Anglican church have many wonderful and accessible books for deeper inquiry. Consider pick-

ing a book by Rowan Williams, Fleming Rutledge, Samuel Wells, N.T. Wright, or Sarah Coakley, among others.

Joining In with your Parish

One of the best ways to grow spiritually is by engaging with other Christians in community. Our clergy and parishes across the diocese love to offer opportunities for us to deepen our faith. Whatever your church has on offer for 2026, whether it is a Bible study, book study, or prayer group, consider joining in and making connections with others while you grow personally in your faith.

These are just a few suggestions for how to make a new start in growing in one’s faith. As you pray and consider what 2026 could be like for you, I pray that it will be a year filled with deeper joy, learning, love, and trust in the One who loves you.