

DIOCESAN EPOST

Celebrating the Diocese of British Columbia

A Section of the ANGLICAN JOURNAL

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Season of light: At St. Peter (in Duncan), the handrail for the path to the historic wooden church has always been brightly lit, but this year most of the Christmas services will be in the church hall. At Trinity Anglican + Lutheran Church in Port Alberni, a backlit cross is displayed on the church for the first time in many years. Photo by Bronwyn Nestegaard Paul, see story on page 3.

New Christmas options planned

BY SUSAN DOWN

Binge-watch recordings or RSVP for a seat

The options for church services used to resemble the early days of television reception. Back then, by carefully positioning an aerial on your roof or fiddling with the v-shaped antennae, also known as “rabbit ears,” sitting on the wooden TV cabinet, you could capture those free electromagnetic waves and be rewarded with the ability to tune into two,

perhaps three channels. And be glad of it, too, despite the snowy black-and-white image on the screen.

Churches were like that. At many rural parishes, a couple of time choices – most often Sunday morning – were all we had. Perhaps another in the afternoon. We didn’t know any differently.

Churches have responded to COVID-19 by giving us more options, not fewer. It has transformed church services the way cable TV and the 500-channel universe have changed our viewing habits. Now you can binge-watch church services any day of the week. Sample the liturgy from Canterbury Cathedral in the UK, perhaps, followed by a sermon from Duncan or Saanich and some organ performances from Victoria. And if the weather’s bad and you’d rather stay home sipping your coffee, watching the livestreaming may be a revelation. As

Christmas approaches, churches are finding new ways to serve the needs of their flocks.

Of course, technology is not always the answer. The demand for human contact is still strong, especially during the Christmas season. But for smaller churches, and there are many in the diocese, the social distancing requirements call for careful planning. Lon Towstego, incumbent at the Parish of Central Saanich, said his parish has some creative plans for a hybrid Christmas celebration, although decorating the church temporarily in October in its Christmas finery for the recording of a video seemed a little odd, he said. And there will be Christmas services at both St Mary and St. Stephen, the latter featuring an outdoor event that included filing through the church for communion. Right now, the churches (reopened since

Continued on page 12

Seeking the holy: from beer to Christmas



**THE VERY REVEREND
M. ANSLEY TUCKER
DIOCESAN ADMINISTRATOR**

When I was first appointed to a rural parish in southern Ontario, a team of energetic parishioners descended upon the rectory to paint, wallpaper and generally assist “Miss Tucker” on moving day. In response, I promptly located the local liquor store and produced a case of beer. It was much appreciated, and so was I.

One town over, in about the same timeframe, a local United Church colleague was moving into her manse. She also produced a case of beer – and was fired.

Now, you may be wondering how I plan to get from beer to Christmas. Like this:

Notwithstanding the indisputable fact that Easter is the most important festival in our church year, Anglicans have always had a soft spot for Christmas. But this isn’t just because our hearts thrill to the song of the angels and the little Lord Jesus asleep on the hay. The truth is that our Anglican appreciation for Christmas extends far beyond greeting card piety. In many ways, it isn’t so much the story of the nativity as its meaning that has captured our imagination. Anglican spirituality is profoundly *incarnational*. We do love the nativity stories in Luke and Matthew; but it is the first chapter of the Gospel of John (“In the beginning was the Word...”) that is written into our Anglican DNA.

The prologue to John’s gospel is about light and darkness, and the Word becoming flesh, and glory. There isn’t a shepherd to be seen, an angel to be heard, or a baby to be swaddled. And yet, we are at the threshold of the true meaning of Christmas, of what it is we mean by “incarnation” (in-fleshing).

Which brings us perilously close to beer!

Incarnation means that God has

bridged the divide between matter and spirit, body and soul, and yes, earth and heaven. We knew this already, but we forgot: according to the book of Genesis, the entire created order is good, indeed, “very good.” Food, nature, art, drink (including beer!), dance, sex, beauty: all of these are capable – in the hands of God and by respectful human stewardship – of conveying sanctity and holiness.

For Anglicans, the incarnation means that we take our “sacramentality” extremely seriously. Those who once memorized the catechism will remember that a sacrament is “an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace.” We rely upon these outward, physical, bodily signs to reveal God to us, and so we value them. We seek the holy in unusual places (like a manger, or for that matter, a squalling infant Jesus), and we take seriously our responsibility to care for and appreciate our material world.

Small surprise, then, that every once in a while, we may find ourselves hoisting a holy beer. ■

The Very Rev. Ansley Tucker is dean of Columbia and rector at Christ Church Cathedral.

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Light in the darkness

BY BRENDA NESTEGAARD PAUL

Trinity Anglican + Lutheran Church has a cross on its building once more!

No one seems to know exactly when the last cross was on our building, Trinity Anglican + Lutheran Church in Port Alberni, but it is thought to be over 20 years ago for sure. About two years ago, I began asking questions and wondering aloud: could we use memorial dollars to place a cross up on the front side of the building? I had discovered that many people in the wider community did not know that it was a church building. Alongside all the other community connections being made, the placement of the cross would be a visible, obvious symbol that would

make the building's reason for being very clear. The council agreed.

Tom Stokes, a member of the congregation, volunteered to make the cross and paint it. He used a piece of recycled timber he had held onto for years, not knowing why. Along the way, Dave Bishop, one of the congregation's wardens, said it should be backlit so that the cross could also be seen at night. All was agreed.

By February of this year, the cross was built and ready to be hung but then came the pandemic. As we needed a bucket with two persons standing very close together to raise the cross, its hanging had to be postponed. New arrangements were made at the end of September, but then there was a storm that scuttled the attempt. Finally, at the beginning of October, all went according to plan and the cross was hung and lit.

As people have seen it, especially at

night, they have described it as a moving experience. As Trinity's other warden, Julie Morgan, said, "Maybe it took until now for us to truly appreciate what it means for us, for all of us."

A light in the darkness. Thanks be to God! ■

Brenda Nestegaard Paul is the rector at Trinity Anglican + Lutheran Church in Port Alberni. The church is starting to open for in-person worship the first Sunday of Advent, but it will not be having regular Christmas services. Videotaped services are continuing into the future and there will be a special Christmas online service for people to view.

As well, Nestegaard Paul and her daughter are looking to produce an Advent/Christmas CD for church members that will include various musicians and leaders sharing music and readings drawn from the Trinity community.

And a child shall teach them

BY CHRIS COLEMAN

Christ Church Cathedral Victoria parishioner Chris Coleman recalls an incident while working as a waiter during his student days. (originally posted on Facebook)

It was early on a Friday evening about three decades ago, and I had the upstairs front section in Chandlers Restaurant. There were two tables in the centre of the room surrounded by six tables adjacent to the walls.

Seated at one of the centre tables was a young mother, her almost-four-year-old son and one of her close female friends. The young lad was happy but precocious. This is always a test in the service industry because, if young customers become bored, their demeanour can change the tone in a room.

The evening was going well, and I decided to keep my young customer's

curiosity piqued by telling him that I was one of a pair of twins. He sensed that I might be pulling his leg but, I explained that "my twin" and I would both be serving his table and he had to look for the differences to tell us apart. Every time I returned to the section, I changed some aspect of my look: my watch switched from one wrist to the other, my corkscrew moved from one side of my waiter's apron to the opposite, my maple leaf pin flipped to the other lapel. Other tables realized what was going on and got into the act, looking for the different nuances between "the twins" who were serving the section.

As I served dinner to the three at the centre table, the young lad declared "You're not twins, you're just moving stuff around!" Folks at other tables laughed, but I said that my twin and I would both come to the table after dessert and he could see for himself. I left the section and approached my friend and fellow server, Jim Slack. Explaining the situation, I asked Jim if he would stand in as my twin. Jim chuckled, but

agreed and shook his head as if to say, "What am I getting myself into now?"

Having prepared their bill, Jim and I went to the centre table and presented ourselves as the twins that had been serving all evening. The young lad said, "You two aren't twins!" This caused others in the room to laugh because, you see, Jim has black skin and my skin is white.

If it had stopped there, it would have been a funny incident, long forgotten over the past 30 years. I however, made the mistake of taking the next step and saying, "Why do you think we're not twins?" The temperature in the room seemed to drop noticeably at this awkward moment; nobody knew what the young lad might say.

I was saved, however, as the four-year-old looked at the two of us. "You're not twins because the stripes in your shirt go this way," he stated, waving his hand up & down to indicate a vertical axis. "And his stripes go this way," he added, again waving, showing the horizontal.

Continued on page 9

Christmas music reimagined

BY DONALD HUNT

“O come, all ye faithful,” the beloved carol exhorts, “O come let us adore him, Christ the Lord.” Yet how are we to celebrate and adore together in a time when a much more prevalent (and arguably, pressing) message is not to come, but to stay – to “stay at home.”

Indeed, as faithful people and the stewards of our Christian tradition, we are asked to reinvent Christmas each year. Our joining together on earth to hear again the message of the angels, to listen to beautiful choral music, and to sing carols, is chief among the reasons why this great mystery happens every year. And so, as liturgical planners, each year we work to create Christmas services by incorporating elements old and new and providing the people of God with a road map on how to join with the angels and make it happen – not just for us, but for God as well.

This time, it’s different.

This year, there will not be 800 people in the cathedral for the Advent procession, the Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols, midnight mass. And the choir of angels will be necessarily small and restrained, their Gloria in excelsis somewhat lacklustre.

So how will we be navigating this unknown terrain? As with many things these days, we’ll be muddling through. Here at Christ Church Cathedral, our plans are to mount an indoor/outdoor festival which attempts to bear all things (or at least as many as possible). Introducing Christmas Reimagined.

The Lucan Christmas narrative will be heard several times each evening from December 21 to 24 on the cathedral commons, whilst giant images are projected on the cathedral’s south tower. And, of course, a few Christmas carols will be interspersed for good measure.

The cathedral, illuminated and bedecked by the warm glow of stained glass and live music, will be open for all who wish to come inside and experience the sacred in whatever way they feel compelled: a brief walk through, a chance to sit and soak in the atmosphere, or a direct encounter with the divine through the holy sacrament.

For lovers of seasonal music, the cathedral will also be mounting ticketed concerts earlier in the evening. Offerings include a 10-piece brass ensemble, an organ recital, and beautiful Christmas cantatas by J.P. Telemann.

My favourite service of the year is the traditional service of Nine Lessons and Carols. It is the pinnacle of what I value about the Anglican choral tradition: the peaceful and challenging coexistence of ancient texts and music with brand new poetry and carols. As in other years, this service will include the premiere of a commissioned carol by Victoria native, Sarah MacDonald. Rather than the massive gathering we’re all used to, the service this year will be pre-recorded and broadcast on CHEK-TV in the days leading up to Christmas, so that we can truly be “a cathedral for the city” during this special season.

The sixth verse of *Adeste Fidelis*, translated by William Brooke in 1885, but not in common usage proclaims: “There shall we see Him,



Donald Hunt is director of music at Christ Church Cathedral. Photo by Catherine Allen Whale

His Eternal Father’s Everlasting Brightness now veiled under flesh; God shall we find there, a Babe in infant clothing. O come let us adore him, Christ the Lord.”

Humanity is messy. The shimmer of divinity can sometimes be hard to see, veiled under the tarnish of our earthly existence – this year even more so than most. When worldly cares oppress, the people of God are called to elevate themselves to the unseen, spiritual realms not yet known.

So be it.

This Christmastide, our care and delight shall be to do as we have always done: to go in heart and mind even unto Bethlehem and see this thing which has come to pass, and the Babe lying in the manger. ■

Donald Hunt is the director of music at Christ Church Cathedral, Victoria.

Cathedral Christmas Schedule

December 20, 4:00 pm:
Solemn Marian Evensong
(in person and livestreamed)

December 20:
Lessons and Carols for Christmas
(pre-recorded service, to be aired on CHEK-TV)

December 21 to 24, 7:30 pm to 8:45 pm:
Christmas Reimagined
Outdoor audiovisual presentation of the Christmas story

- Illuminations projected on the South Tower with narrations and music of the Christmas story from Luke
- Two showings each evening (20 mins): 7:30 pm and 8:00 pm
- Cathedral open for quiet meditation and prayer
- Bell ringing from 7:15 pm to 7:30pm

December 22, 6:30 pm:
Concert: Donald Hunt, organ
“From heaven on high”
(in person)

December 23, 4:00 pm and 6:30 pm:
Concert: A Pacific Baroque
Festival Christmas (in person)

December 24, 4:00 pm and 6:30 pm:
Concert: Pinnacle Brass and
Victoria Brass “The trumpet shall sound” (in person)

December 25, 9:00 am and 11:00 am:
Holy Eucharist for the Feast of the Nativity (Christmas Day)
(in person and livestreamed)



Life after COVID-19

BY SUSAN DOWN

Saanich parishioner talks about her ordeal

Like many people, Cathy Novak is anxious about COVID-19. But unlike the others, she knows firsthand of its devastating toll on health. She remains on medical leave from her job as a dental hygienist, slowly recuperating after contracting the virus in the spring.

Cathy has told her story to the news media several times, but she and her husband, John McAllister, agreed to meet me in their backyard (10 weeks after coming home) to talk about how faith sustained them.

Returning home to Victoria after attending the Pacific Dental Conference in Vancouver in early March, Cathy, a healthy 60-year-old, noticed mild flu-like symptoms. When she wasn't improving, she made an appointment at the newly-opened testing centre, and less than 24 hours later, she got the verdict: she had tested positive for COVID-19.

Meanwhile, in her household, they were careful not to spread the illness. That second week, she started taking her temperature several times a day, watching her fever rise and fall. She got daily phone calls from the health authority. Lon Towstego, the couple's minister at the Parish of Central Saanich, phoned to pray with her. The couple had been married at the church only six years before. A second marriage for both of them, they met at a local square dance club.

By March 21, her symptoms had worsened so much, they called an ambulance, and the masked and gowned attendants asked to meet her at the door. But Cathy found that just getting herself to the entrance to meet them was an ordeal. "Cathy was fighting to get on a pair of

pants and shaking really badly. When she got to the front door she sat down and her breathing sounded like she'd run a marathon," said John.

It would be a month before he saw her again.

At the Royal Jubilee Hospital in Victoria, Cathy was put on a ventilator the same day. She was put in an induced coma for two weeks in the special COVID-19 intensive care unit and remained in the hospital until April 20. At the time of her diagnosis (a week after the World Health Organization declared the pandemic) BC had identified only about 100 cases. As of September 21, that number has swelled to more than 8,000.

During the agonizing wait when Cathy was in a coma, John, who works in IT education support with Island Catholic Schools, says he was sustained by what he calls the three Fs – faith, friends and family. "I have always found that prayer is an amazing thing," he said. He routinely went walking after dark, not wanting to bump into people he knew. Towstego continued to pray with him on the phone daily. "I had some pretty heavy-duty arguments with God," he said. "My relationship with Cathy is the best thing that ever happened to me. All I get is six years?" About halfway through, he felt God saying she wasn't going to die, so he felt hope return.

For her part, Cathy believes her faith has been intensified after the experience. "I've always felt like I don't walk alone." After helping three elderly relatives through their last years, she used to joke that she didn't want to live to her 80s, claiming it was nothing but doctor's appointments and aches and pains. "I've always been very grateful for things, but I came out of this horrible ordeal just feeling that much more grateful," she said.

Looking through all the messages of love and support that came during her hospital stay, was like "going to my own funeral," said Cathy. "We had people across Canada praying for me."

The severe effects of the virus and the coma have made for a long recovery for Cathy. After waking from the coma, she



Cathy Novak and her husband John McAllister

looked at the clocks and thought they were running backwards. Cathy speaks three languages, but for weeks she struggled for the right words when she talked. She now does daily Sudoku and word puzzles to exercise her brain. When she came home, she wasn't able to open a pop can. Now her hand tremours have subsided and her strength is back.

The trauma caused much of her hair to fall out, and she has a shorter shoulder length hairstyle, trimmed by John. "The hair loss really brought me down for some time as it took me by surprise," she said. "Now I try to appreciate that it reminds me of how much I went through and therefore should give myself a break when I don't accomplish my daily goals."

Despite the progress in her recovery, she finds the new social normal frustrating. "I still have to conquer my anxiety about everything COVID," said Cathy, adding that what she misses most is hugging her mother. "We go out for nightly walks and we've kept to ourselves a lot," she said. "We are missing our favourite people and activities, but still feel safer in our little cocoon." ■

Susan Down is editor of the Diocesan Post.

Christmas traditions remembered

BY CHRIS COLEMAN

I always liked the Dylan Thomas classic narrative, “A Child’s Christmas in Wales,” because it taps into an undeniable and humorous sense of nostalgia about Christmas. That nostalgia is largely based on the expectation that the traditions of the season will remain the same each year. It was a warm and comfortable feeling of permanence. Growing up on Pender Island, I had my own nostalgic west coast Christmas traditions. Most memorable among these were:

- the arrival of the Santa Ship at Hope Bay about a week before the 25th
- decorations going up in our house the day after Mother’s birthday (Dec 15th)
- family “coming home for the holidays”
- the playing of Christmas music on the record player (especially Harry Belafonte’s Christmas album!)
- the various church services and the seasonal music
- the food, the laughter, the aromas that

filled our house on Christmas Day.

The reality is, of course, traditions evolve as new components are added and, sometimes, older ones are left behind. The Santa Ship, for example, no longer does its run through the Gulf Islands. All the Coleman family members have married and now have their own traditions to share with their children and grandchildren. While I still listen to Harry Belafonte’s carols, I’ve embraced a vast number of newer songs (like Peter, Paul & Mary’s Hasidic carol “Light One Candle,” or a young Kate Illingworth introducing the Cathedral congregation to “Mary Did You Know” at the family service on Christmas Eve).

I have been fortunate also to find opportunities in the larger community that reflect the sense of sharing, to which Jesus expects us to adhere. For just over a decade, I have taken a couple of hours on Christmas afternoon to drop by the James Bay Community Centre to thank the 40 volunteers who

serve a traditional meal (with all the trimmings!) to more than 100 seniors who might otherwise be alone on Christmas Day. I don’t know how that will occur this “pandemic season,” but I know the sense of community will change and evolve in a way that allows that sharing to continue.

For four decades, a small group of ex-Keg staff has organized a community choir that sings in pubs, malls and condo Christmas parties, raising funds for CFA Santa’s Anonymous. Not so in the 2020 Christmas season, but we will find other ways to support this children’s charity.

While Christmas 2020 will necessarily be different because of how the COVID pandemic second wave constrains much of our traditional hospitality, the basis of our faith endures. We will continue to celebrate the joy of His birth, the direction He set for us and the love He continues to show us.

May the Christmas 2020 be joyous and different, and may you find the peace that Christ wants us all to share! ■

Chris Coleman is a parishioner at Christ Church Cathedral.

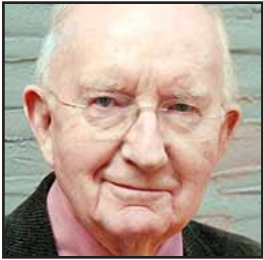


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The cave that became an inn



Reflections

BY HERBERT O'DRISCOLL

As he strained to close the massive wooden gate of the enclosure, slamming the heavy wooden bolt into its socket, he realized that it was becoming more and more of an effort. For three generations now, the family had been custodians of this large, walled enclosure built by his grandfather on the edge of the village.

The old man, then in his prime, had seen a business opportunity in the fact that many of the caravans out of Jerusalem came through the Bethlehem area, often needing a night's stopover. Over the years the business had prospered. Samuel himself had taken it over when his father was severely injured while helping to deal with a restless, angry camel whose inexperienced driver had tried to lash into submission.

Samuel had been a mere 17-year-old. However, he was able to take over the formidable chores each morning as the caravans set out, leaving behind the filth and stench of the night, both human and animal. Now, even as a healthy 55-year-old, he knew that in the absence of a son, the time was nearing to sell the business.

The memory of his father's injury brought back another memory, something that had happened a few days later. His father had been at home trying to recover from the injury he had received. Samuel had had to take over organizing the nightly arrivals, deciding where to allot space, settling arguments between camel drivers, making sure everyone paid for the night's lodging.

Samuel recalled that the long-ago evening had been unusually busy. The census ordered by Rome meant many people were on the move. His mother had come from the nearby family home to help him.

At a fairly late hour, there came a knock at the gate. When he went to check, he was astonished to see a man standing by a donkey on which sat a young woman, obviously in the late stages of pregnancy. Both looked in utterly exhausted. The man begged to be given shelter for the night.

Samuel was appalled. He could not possibly find space for a young woman late in pregnancy among the heaving, drinking, swearing mass of humanity and beast behind him. Yet he could not bring himself to turn the pathetic couple away.

Just then, his mother, who had been assisting him with his chores, came from behind him and went immediately to the young woman. They had a short, murmured exchange after which she turned and beckoned to Samuel.

South of the village, on the ridge that looked east out over the Judean desert, Bedouin families had their herds of sheep and goats. Families had their large, goatskin tents as living areas, but each also had use of one of the many caves in the limestone ridge of the escarpment. Samuel was given the name of a particular family. He was to go immediately. His mother would follow with the travellers.

When Samuel made his request of the family their response was immediate. The cave, warm and sheltered from the night, was cleared to make some space. Its floor was swept. Straw, sweet smelling and dry, filled the byre to form a bed. All was ready when the travellers arrived with Samuel's mother. She immediately directed Samuel to return to the enclosure in case of any trouble. She herself would stay.

Later she would do the age-old things that must be done to give us birth. When she at last placed the tiny body on the girl's breast, she asked if they had decided on a name. The man said softly, "His name is Jeshua."

Far down on the fields below the escarpment, some shepherds noticed a light in one of the caves. It was unusual for a cave to be lit in the night hours, so they decided a few of them should go and investigate. Above them, the desert sky sang with a thousand glittering stars...

Thanks to both Richard LeSueur and John Barton for background information that made this telling possible.

Luke in his Gospel never meant the Greek word he used (*katalumati*) to be understood as an inn as we know it. It was a place where "one lets down one's harness and baggage for the night, a public caravansary." No wonder the young custodian of the camel enclosure was nonplussed by Joseph's desperate request for shelter. The stable that was found was far more like an inn, clean, warm, welcoming.

When Jesus told the story of the Good Samaritan and wished to refer to an inn as we today understand it, he used the Greek word: *pandocheion*. ■

Herb O'Driscoll is a retired priest and a prolific author and hymn writer.

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Comfortably Unnumb: a new recovery group formed

BY NANCY FORD

Hope is difficult in this double crisis: substance use deaths and COVID-19. We know the number of deaths from overdose continue to outstrip the numbers of those who have died from COVID-19 and all other causes of death including accidental deaths, vehicular deaths, homicides, and non-COVID illness related deaths.

In Victoria, the Umbrella Society for Addictions and Mental Health is one of only two Canadian recipients of a grant from the DIAKONIA World Federation set up to meet the pandemic crisis. The diverse range of this work is certain to have a global effect. The project grants offer hope in a variety of geographic and cultural settings such as Georgia (the country), the Philippines, El Salvador,

Nigeria, Rwanda, St. Kitts, the US and Canada.

We felt this project is an absolute must in our community. That we seek to work with other agencies and groups to ensure the most vulnerable in recovery receive support is crucial. As Evan James, team lead for Umbrella, said in an interview with CBC Radio, "If a person new in recovery slips once, it could be a death sentence."

Our local project, proposed by Sharlene Law, executive director of the Umbrella Society, and me, is for those newly out of treatment and needing support. They are particularly vulnerable, since having not used for awhile, their bodies are detoxified. Also, the drug supply has become progressively toxic. This has made the use of Naloxone (an emergency antidote to opioid overdose) sometimes ineffective in reversing the effects of an overdose.

The funding we received will support a new group program through Umbrella called Comfortably Un-numb: learning to live without substances. The group is ideal

for those who have chosen to live their lives without substances, and need help managing the next steps in their recovery journey. The group will delve into important topics such as communications, finances, relationships, forgiveness and much more. It has already shown itself to be a success!

The pandemic has brought different forms of enforced isolation. When there has been a death the usual opportunities to grieve with friends and family are no longer easily available. This is even more difficult for those who grieve someone lost to overdose. Sadness can become overwhelming when it is impossible to gather, to share story and to share tears. Since we cannot gather in person, Christ Church Cathedral will continue the tradition of holding a memorial for those who died through overdose. Although virtual, it offers an opportunity to remember and to know that those who have died are remembered. A recording of the Nov. 3 memorial will be found on the Cathedral website. ■

The Rev. Canon Nancy Ford is the deacon to the city at Christ Church Cathedral.



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And a child shall teach them

Continued from page 3

For a moment, the room stood still. The eyes of the two women widened. Jim and I stood with dumb grins on our

faces. Silence fell on the other tables. Then one of the customers began to clap as everyone realized this young man had not been taught to see differences in people by the colour of their skin. He saw only two men trying to tease him, and he was better than that. I'm sure my tips were good that evening,

but the "gift" that young man gave me was far more valuable. Jim says it underscores our role in the ongoing struggle to address and stop, systemic discrimination.

Until now, I've never said "thank you" to that young lad (he's now about 35), but I've always appreciated the lesson. ■

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Christmas without Gordon

BY ADELA TORCHIA

This article first appeared in the December 2017 issue of the Diocesan Post.

Every Christmas many people's hearts have 'holes' in them where a lost loved resides. Increasingly such loved ones may have been lost to opioid drug overdoses or fentanyl poisoning, with an average of one such death every two hours in Canada from 2016 - 2018. Our family joined these swelling numbers on September 11, 2017 when my twenty year-old grandson Gordon succumbed to this epidemic. His death was no surprise since he'd spent winter 2016 in Victoria's Tent City, and then after summer months back home in Winnipeg, he headed to Vancouver just before Christmas 2016. Promising his mother that he'd try and get back home for the summer, instead he stayed to enjoy Vancouver's lovely dry summer that year -- a treat for the homeless after winters of being continually wet with foot rot and other attendant afflictions.

On one level, Gordon was homeless by choice since various family members were open to making room for him, but after graduating high school and being unable to find a job (partly due to step-dad not allowing jobs during high school), I think he became increasingly desperate and alienated from a culture in which he could not succeed. His upbringing contained various factors to which this "interfering grandmother" objected ... but in retrospect it's quite possible that everyone involved was doing the best they could understand to do. Even without a problematic upbringing, many young people in our society today reach terrible levels of alienation and despair in a culture where they may never be able to afford a family home, and where the world is so challenged by violence, greed and

indifference towards so many aspects of earthly suffering. Lies, corruption, dishonesty and apathy can easily seem overwhelming, and drug dealers are lurking on many corners to try and hook the discouraged youth into a quick fix or euphoric high. And of course each time the high and its duration decrease, creating the craving for bigger doses consumed more often.

After the paramedics found Gordon on the street in cardiac arrest, did extensive CPR to restart his heart, and brought him to St. Paul's hospital in Vancouver, his mother, uncle and I travelled there for what would become the last few days of his earthly journey. The ICU staff were fantastically caring given how swamped they'd been with such cases for so long. Amazingly they also allowed other street friends to visit the dying patient if family allows, so we got a close-up view of these deep and caring street family relationships. Seeing his life support breathing tubes and his unconscious state some of them would say to us: "But he's gonna' be okay, right? He overdosed before as many of us have also done, and we all recover, right?" No, we had to tell them, no ... Gordon was likely brain dead and would probably have to be taken off life support soon. The great tears of anguish that were shed not only by blood family but by street family members was a sight to behold, and the caring staff treated everyone with the utmost of dignity.

Just before Christmas 2016, Gordon messaged me to ask for a Christmas gift of bus fare from Calgary to Vancouver, and I told him that no I could not countenance paying his way to the fentanyl drug capital of Canada. So he said with his characteristic affection and humour: "Okay Grandma, then I'll just have to hitchhike my frozen ass over the Coquihalla." The Christmas before when he was in Victoria's Tent City, and I was up island at a sumptuous feast, I felt so strongly the contrast between his circumstances and mine, that I was apparently very poor company and



Gordon Daniel Matthew Torchia, high school graduation.

will likely never be invited there again (phew!).

And what will this Christmas hold for me and for so many amongst us who mourn the loss of a loved one in such circumstances? It will be sad of course, remembering the sweet little boy as he grew up, the affable teenager so caring and loving to so many ... seeing others about his age enjoying the gifts and the feasts all around. And yet we know we are not alone both amongst the living who also cherish the memory of their lost loved ones, and amongst the heavenly chorus, now potentially including these lost souls who could not manage to make their way in this world, who may have 'burned too brightly' so their light diminished and disappeared too soon. Perhaps with the ears of our hearts we'll hear them humming soft carols filtered through the starlight ...

O come thou Day-Spring, come and cheer ... and death's dark shadows put to flight. ■

Adela Torchia is priest-in-charge at the Two Saints Ministry.

Chocolate Jesus

BY CHRISTOPHER PAGE

In his irreverent and darkly sarcastic song, “Chocolate Jesus,” singer Tom Waits points a finger at Christians who use faith to anesthetize themselves against reality. He points to the danger of turning Jesus into just one more commodity competing for consumer loyalty in the marketplace of feel-good remedies for the aches and pains of our sorry lives.

*Well I don't go to church on Sunday
Don't get on my knees to pray
Don't memorize the books of the Bible
I got my own special way
I know Jesus loves me
Maybe just a little bit more
I fall down on my knees every Sunday
At Zerelda Lee's candy store*

*Well it's got to be a chocolate Jesus
Make me feel good inside
Got to be a chocolate Jesus
Keep me satisfied*

*Well I don't want no Anna Zabba
Don't want no Almond Joy
There ain't nothing better
Suitable for this boy
Well it's the only thing
That can pick me up
Better than a cup of gold
See only a chocolate Jesus
Can satisfy my soul*

*When the weather gets rough
And it's whiskey in the shade
It's best to wrap your savior
Up in cellophane
He flows like the big muddy
But that's ok*

*Pour him over ice cream
For a nice parfait*

*Well it's got to be a chocolate Jesus
Good enough for me
Got to be a chocolate Jesus
Good enough for me*

*Well it's got to be a chocolate Jesus
Make me feel so good inside
Got to be a chocolate Jesus
Keep me satisfied*

The temptation of feel-good religion is a risk for any faith system. It is always tempting to try to draw a crowd by packaging the Gospel as “Things go better with Christ.” The lure of a quick fix solution to all the aches and pains of life is a deeply compelling misrepresentation of Jesus’ teaching.

Jesus did not point the way to a carefree life. He did not promise to smooth over all the difficulties of living in this world. He did not offer a recipe for transforming life into “a nice parfait.”

Jesus was a clear-eyed realist. He knew life in this world is never easy. He knew human beings will always struggle.

A lot of life hurts. Even in our extraordinarily privileged over-developed western world, we often experience life as deeply troubling. The only surprise is when we are surprised. The danger is that we turn to religion, or science, or entertainment, or work, or family, or pharmaceuticals, as an anaesthetic against the inevitability of pain.

One of the earliest and most zealous teachers of the Jesus way, a man named Paul, complained about his own lot in life saying, “to keep me from being too elated, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me, to keep me from being too elated. Three times I appealed to the Lord about this, that it would leave me.” (2 Corinthians 12:7,8)

Elsewhere, Paul lamented, “Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?” (Romans 7:24)

Paul had no chocolate Jesus. He wrestled with the realities of life, just as most of us struggle from time to time. He knew the pain of temptation, and experienced the agony of physical suffering. His deep and compelling faith in Christ did not remove Paul from the difficult realities of the human condition.

But, Paul did not stop simply with lamentation and complaint. He went on to affirm that, in the midst of his struggle, he sensed God saying to him, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.”

And so Paul concluded, “I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me.” (2 Corinthians 12:9)

We do not need a chocolate Jesus. We are diminished as human beings when we seek to escape from the pain that is an inevitable part of the human condition. We only need to stop being puzzled by the pain. We need to give up our fear that pain has the power to annihilate us. Faith is the deep inner knowing that pain is not bigger than the reality of God’s presence dwelling in our lives.

While it is not possible to escape the pain; it is possible to discover a measure of peace when we stop resisting. When we open to the pain and walk the way Jesus chose to walk, the pain will open us to the heart of compassion that pulses at the centre of all life. We will be nourished by the sustaining presence of God. This is a steady reality no chocolate Jesus can provide. ■

The Rev. Christopher Page is the rector at St. Philip, Oak Bay. This column first appeared in his blog, A Spacious Place.

RENEWED **HEARTS** RENEWED **SPIRITS** RENEWED **PEOPLE**



Saying yes to dreams



BY JUDY ROIS

At AFC we love, more than anything, to say Yes! and to help our parishes imagine more. The Foundation has been saying yes steadily and unfailingly, through good times and bad, for more than 60 years.

In the Diocese of British Columbia, since 2010, we have said Yes! to more than \$200,000 in grants for your parishes. The vast majority of that investment has been in buildings and programs including projects that revitalize Indigenous living languages and other projects that reduce barriers and make it possible for those with mobility issues to continue to participate in church life. Additionally, AFC has provided funding for The Emmaus Community, eco-justice internships, energy-efficient upgrades to parishes, a fabric-arts hanging for the Vancouver Island Regional Correctional Centre, and bursaries to choristers for travel.

This past May, in spite of the challenges of the COVID-19 crisis and the impact on AFC's investment portfolio, we said Yes! to two churches in the diocese: St. Peter, Duncan; and St. Mary of the Incarnation in Metchosin (Greater Victoria).

For nearly 10 years now as executive director of the foundation, I've had a front-row seat to some of the Canadian church's best ideas and the ministries and programs parish visionaries might undertake if only they had some strategic funding to help them get started. Knowing what I know about the innovative and compassionate character of the church, nationally, I cannot help but feel hopeful about the future.



Please be assured that AFC will continue to be a force for stability. We have been there and will continue to be there no matter what the future may hold. For AFC to remain strong and vibrant, however, I am asking those who can continue to partner with us to do so. If you are a member, I ask you to renew your membership. If you have never been a member of the foundation before, please accept this invitation to pay it forward.

The social and economic impact of COVID-19 on people and communities will undoubtedly give rise to compassionate and innovative responses on the part of our

churches. To those currently discerning how to meet a real and pressing need in their communities – faithful leaders in the Diocese of British Columbia among them – we want to respond as generously as possible.

Join us and help AFC continue to be able to say Yes! to the dreams and aspirations of the people and parishes in your diocese, and to so many more across the country. ■

To donate to the Anglican Foundation of Canada visit anglicanfoundation.org.

Judy Rois is executive director of the Anglican Foundation of Canada.



Judy Rois

New Christmas options planned

Continued from cover

mid-July) both attract about 35 people to the services. “The key is that we follow protocols really carefully,” said Towstego. “The congregation has stuck together online, and we are working hard to stay in touch.”

Convincing people to attend isn't the issue at St. Peter, Quamichan (in Duncan). It's getting people to go home that can be difficult, says M.J. Leewis-Kirk, the incumbent. “Not everybody wants to leave after the service. We ask them to go out to the parking lot to visit,” she said. As a way to

meet that need, she is exploring the idea of trivia contests for social evenings on Zoom.

The congregation has moved the altar and piano keyboard into the more expansive church hall for services since reopening on Labour Day. Attendees at the 8 a.m. service (about half the normal size at 15 people) are back in the historic 1877 church. Because the St. Peter's choir and congregation aren't singing (although parishioners have asked if they can hum), music director Barry De Silva instead presents medleys of hymns, classical pieces and his own compositions (he's written 17 hymns). He's been known to slip in some Louis Armstrong (It's a Wonderful World) as well. “We are trying to use music to space out parts of a service,” he said. “If we can't do it in the traditional

way, we are finding ways to present it. We get lots of positive feedback.” Without the choral anthems in the traditional Advent service, he is preparing other music to mix in with the readings and homilies.

The current pandemic is one of the biggest challenges in Leewis-Kirk's career in the ministry, considering she lived in the US during 9/11 in 2001 and has been in communities hit by floods and fire. But this calamity is different. “It's never been this intense for this long,” she said. Still the rectors and their parishes in the diocese are stoically continuing on, finding ways to keep the people together. ■

Susan Down is the editor of the Diocesan Post.