

The Friends of Clare and Francis

~ a youth mentoring program in Parksville, BC ~

In July 2020, our parish community of St. Anne & St. Edmund, Parksville, began a youth mentoring and employment program, *The Friends of Clare and Francis*, with four students of senior high school and university age, Juliette, Allison, Evan, and Luke. The program continued in modified form through the winter, with a view to a further summer and year-round program in 2021.

The key mentoring and daily supervision for the summer program was provided by the Rev. Andrew Twiddy (*CompanionSSF*), Rector and Incumbent of the parish, with our Program Associate Mandy Truman bringing her expertise and varied training in teamwork, vulnerable populations, office management, and horticultural development. Mandy provided hands-on leadership and mentoring in all matters relating to building, grounds, and cleaning during the week, and Andrew's arranged co-ordination for spiritual formation and Sunday programming. Our Priest Associate, the Rev. Christine Muise (*CompanionSSF*), and senior Program Associate Kathy Miller, provided additional leadership in the summer based on their time availability. In the late fall and winter, Christine took over the lead with Sunday programming for youth.

Together, [the 8 of us](#) formed *The Friends of Clare and Francis*, our team of youth and adults here to implement the parish's program [Letting Our Light Shine](#) – a program of outreach and ministry that our parish initiated at our annual vestry meeting in February 2020 as a part of a wider diocesan initiative under the title of *Transforming Futures*.

This *Friends of Clare and Francis* program was an organic follow-up to and natural expansion of the previous year's summer youth program (2019), and was designed to give youth vital life experience, education, and service opportunities, primarily through employment opportunities that were a combination of the *Canada Summer Jobs* program, and our own community commitment to service.

In a context of an emerging global pandemic, where so many of our elders and volunteers have been safely sheltering and minimizing their in-person contacts, the formation of a small youth-based work force enabled us to provide [a timely and appropriate response to our essential services as a faith community](#) and as a community-service organization. With the help and initiative of our youth, and their supervisors, we were able address the important questions of safety, sanitation, groundskeeping and beautification, cemetery and churchyard care, and combine this with an opportunity for compassionate action and personal and spiritual growth,

through an intentional element of following in the footsteps of Clare and Francis of Assisi, our spiritual guides from the 13th century!

In relationship to our spiritual heritage and primary parish priority of “spiritual growth”, our aim was to allow our students to experience a rhythm of “work” and “prayer” in the way that our Anglican tradition and many other varied spiritual and wisdom traditions of the world teach and make available to us. Sitting in silence for 20 minutes of meditation was “work”, just as much as 20-minutes of lawn-mowing or weeding was “prayer”. An hour in church to create a safe environment for in-person worship, or to share in leading worship through readings, music, and liturgy was “work”, just as much as an hour of sanitizing surfaces and cleaning floors, offered in a spirit of co-operation and gratitude, was a form of “prayer-in-motion”.

Our youth team gradually expanded their role within Sunday programming, providing their gifts of vocal and instrumental music, and public reading and speaking, and serving at the altar, as well as the vital tasks of registering those who attended, and maintaining the new safety and sanitation routines that have become standard parts of so many of our lives over 2020. We were glad to welcome one additional youth, Hope, to add both her vocal gifts in music, and her volunteer participation in the team for a few days of outdoor work, including the restoration of our memorial garden.

The educational components were based on varying degrees of engagement with the following Franciscan sources:

- Andrew’s local interpretation of *Beyond the Birdbath*, an online summer course with Franciscan priest Richard Rohr, OFM, from the *Center for Action and Contemplation (CAC)*
- *The Sultan and the Saint*, a PBS documentary on the interrelationship of spirituality and psychology, of compassion, violence, and warfare, through the lens of Christianity and Islam in the experience of Francis of Assisi and the Egyptian Sultan al-Malik al-Kamil.
- *Time to Pray*, an online app from the Church of England to enable a participation in the traditional patterns and rhythms of the Anglican offices
- The Daily Office of the *The Mission of St Clare*, an online app following the offices of the Episcopal Church of the USA.
- A contemporary inter-spiritual resource, *The 21-Day Meditation Experience*, – a daily online meditation experience with Oprah (Winfrey) & Deepak (Chopra), on the themes of gratitude and growth, through guided group teaching and silent meditation.
- *Embers from the Fire*, an online interactive circle by Zoom that ran weekly in spring and monthly in the summer, featuring readings of the Indigenous wisdom of BC writer Richard Wagamese, in his book *Embers from the Fire*, and including Indigenous Anglican

methodology of Gospel-Based Discipleship (GBD) and resources from the *Disciple* booklet, authored by Anglican Indigenous Archbishop Mark Macdonald. We were graced with two sessions in which Archbishop Mark also “zoomed in” personally to participate in our sessions, including singing a song for us with his guitar.

At the public and in-person level, we ran a socially-distanced and restricted-numbers summer retreat at the interfaith Bethlehem Centre in Nanaimo, BC, under the theme of *Creation-Centred Spirituality*. We ran this both as an in-person event in a beautiful lakeside environment, and also as a live broadcast, in its teaching sessions, through the medium of the Facebook page *Spirituality Beyond Borders*. Youth were both assisting in running the program, and participating as retreatants. Our materials engaged with Scripture, the tradition of the mystics, and questions of action in our current ecological crises.

Our retreat featured seasoned spiritual teachers Pearl Gervais and Bishop Remi De Roo, working alongside Andrew, who co-ordinated the retreat, as well as teaching. Pearl is a wonderful animator, teacher, author, facilitator of spiritual growth, and a stellar teacher of Enneagram spirituality. At 96, Remi is the last active Roman Catholic bishop to have participated in all sessions of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1966), also attended the 1967 Lambeth Conference, and has had a lifetime passion for ecumenical and interfaith work, as an “Apostle of Vatican II”. He also was appointed guardian of the Franciscans of Western Canada in 1963, and, he says, has never knowingly had that role withdrawn! In [one of our memorable sessions](#), Remi posed as Thomas Aquinas (with a focus on some materials by Matthew Fox), Pearl became Hildegard of Bingen, and Andrew presented as Francis of Assisi.

The Rev. Andrew Twiddy, CompanionSSF

Epiphany, 2021

St. Anne & St. Edmund, Parksville