

Bishops slam prayer ban bid

Bill to ‘strengthen secularism’ could violate Charter: Anglican bishop of Quebec



PHOTO: JANET BEST
The Rev. Keith Schmidt leads a Rogation procession down the sidewalk and into the Church of St. John the Evangelist, Montreal in May 2019.

Matthew Puddister
STAFF WRITER

Anglican bishops in Quebec are strongly opposing a planned law that would ban prayer in public spaces, warning it would further erode human rights while criminalizing people of faith.

Claiming that the “proliferation of street prayer is a serious and sensitive issue,” Secularism Minister Jean-François Roberge announced Aug. 28 that the provincial government would introduce a bill in the fall to “strengthen secularism in Quebec, in particular by banning street prayers.”

Bishop of Quebec Bruce Myers said such a law would violate the rights to freedom of religion and freedom of peaceful assembly enshrined in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, Quebec’s own Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms and the United Nations’ Universal Declaration of Human

See BILL, p. 11



PHOTO: REUTERS/TOBY MELVILLE

A new Archbishop of Canterbury

Bishop of London Sarah Mullally has been named Archbishop of Canterbury, U.K. Prime Minister Keir Starmer announced Oct. 3, as this issue was in the final stages of production. Mullally will become the first woman in history to hold the office when she is installed in March 2026. For full coverage, visit anglicanjournal.com and upcoming print issues.

Seeds of change

As climate warms, Anglicans in Canada and abroad mobilize to plant trees

Sean Frankling
STAFF WRITER

The pages of Scripture are rife with roots and branches. From the fruit trees in the Garden of Eden to the Tree of Life to the wood of the Cross itself, trees appear constantly. National Indigenous Anglican Archbishop Chris Harper calls the tree an image of growth, renewal and interconnectedness. Like trees, he says, humans are rooted in their communities and grow from small seeds into beings that can branch outward to benefit not just themselves, but future generations.

Scripture, he says, uses the image of the tree to show us our calling to bear fruit. “We go forward from something so small, so insignificant [and] can do amazing things and be so productive if we but have faith,” he says. But the benefits of planting a tree don’t show themselves overnight, says Harper—it’s an investment in future generations.

Perhaps their scriptural significance is why trees also loom so large in the



PHOTO: CONTRIBUTED

Volunteers water a newly planted sapling provided by the diocese of Ottawa’s Branches of Hope initiative.

imaginations of Anglicans working on creation care work, he says. Initiatives like the international Communion Forest, the Lungs of the Earth campaign and even local tree-planting projects draw on the Anglican association between caring for creation and planting a tree. So

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Film deals bring churches extra revenue, stresses

Sean Frankling
STAFF WRITER

Editor’s Note: Sean Frankling is a parishioner at Little Trinity Church, mentioned in this article.

When St. Clement’s Anglican Church in North Vancouver, B.C. got a request to use their building for filming a TV production going by the name “Megasword” in 2024, says the Rev. Helen Dunn, the church’s rector, it was the church’s first time being approached for a film rental. So conversations quickly began in the church community—not just about the rental rate, on which Dunn says the production company made a generous offer—but about how the filming would impact regular

use of the church’s space, how the content of the show would reflect on the church and how the church could turn the filming to the benefit of its ministries. As it turned out, Dunn says, the filming was a remarkably positive experience on all these counts.

While major film productions do not come to every town and city across Canada, some, like Toronto and Vancouver, have thriving film industries, and these can present opportunities for churches looking to make use of their space and generate additional revenue. The *Journal* spoke to members of two such parishes about the challenges and opportunities they weigh when renting out

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PEOPLE ▶

Spreading the ‘aroma of Christ’

A lay academic takes the helm at Wycliffe

Sean Frankling
STAFF WRITER

Seminaries are seeing a change in the type of education and school experience students are seeking and will need to adapt accordingly, the new principal of the University of Toronto’s Wycliffe College says.

This summer, Kristen Deede Johnson became the first non-ordained principal of the University of Toronto’s Wycliffe College, a fact which she says points to the school’s willingness to try new approaches to the traditional work of theological education. She says Christian institutions can adapt as the role of faith in Canadian society continues to change.

Historically, it has been normal for students to move to Toronto, attend Wycliffe full-time and work towards a degree in theology and often ordination, Deede Johnson says. Now, more students are studying part-time and many are commuting from their home communities, she says. Not as many are seeking ordination, but more are looking to deepen their theological understanding and share the results with their home church and neighbours through their regular faith lives.

To meet the needs of the church today, Johnson says, the school will need to turn out graduates who can embody the fruits of the spirit in whatever ways fit



▲ “[With] the right circumstances, we can be interwoven rather than knotted up,” Deede Johnson, pictured here in her office at Wycliffe, says of the church and the world.

PHOTO:
SEAN FRANKLING

the communities they find themselves serving. They’ll need the ability to identify gaps and find ways to fill them so that the value of the church—“the aroma of Christ”—is apparent in churches to Christians and non-Christians alike, she says. And that, in turn, will demand a spirit of service and the ability to improvise.

Johnson succeeds Bishop Stephen Andrews, who had served as the college’s principal since 2016 after seven years as bishop of the diocese of Algoma. She comes to Wycliffe after having served as dean and vice president of academic affairs at Western Theological Seminary

in Holland, Michigan. She tells the *Journal* she came to faith while she was in high school as a member of a family who considered faith part of its heritage but did not treat it as a living reality. Growing up in the Washington, D.C. area and London, England, she says, she often had to grapple with what it meant to be a Christian in places where her belief system was one of many.

Johnson earned a bachelor’s degree in political and social thought from the University of Virginia and a PhD in theology from Saint Andrew’s University. She has written books on theology’s intersection with social issues, including *Theology, Political Theory, and Pluralism: Beyond Tolerance and Difference* and *The Justice Calling: Where Passion Meets Perseverance*.

There is a large, complex system of roots from which everyone grows, Johnson says—the varying traditions from which they draw their beliefs, perspectives and ways of thinking. She believes in embracing and learning from the complex system of roots to try and weave a more harmonious understanding of how they might fit together.

From this, she says, grow the ways Christians can then reach out into the world to project the love of Christ and change the world for the better.

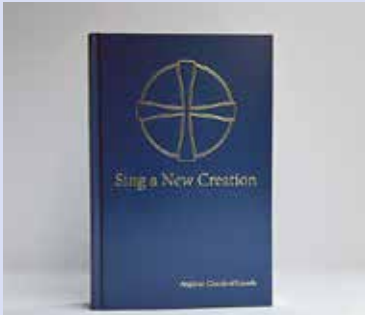
“[With] the right circumstances, we can be interwoven rather than knotted up,” she says. ■



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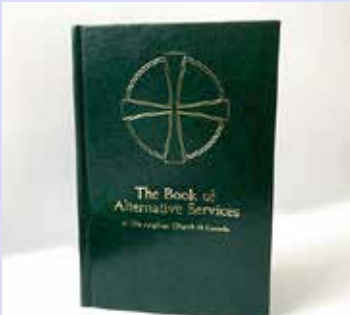
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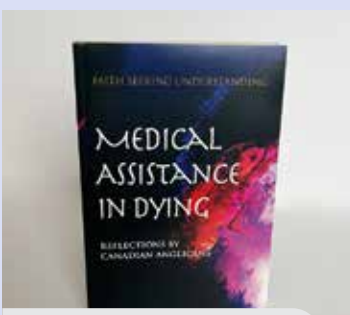
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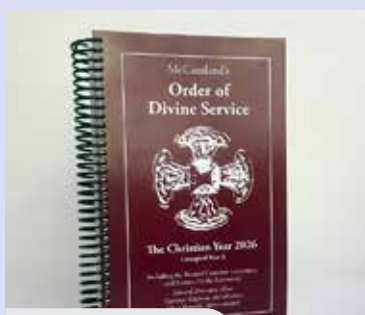
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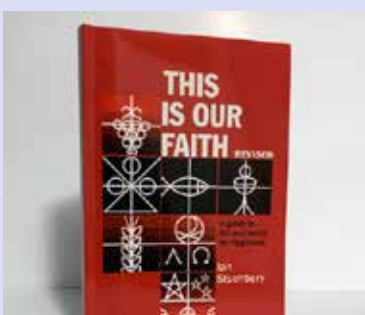
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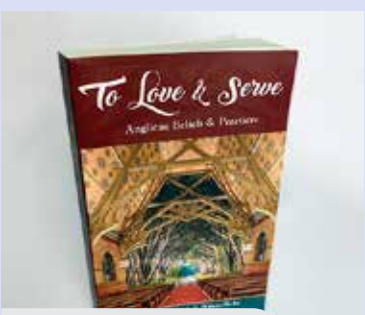
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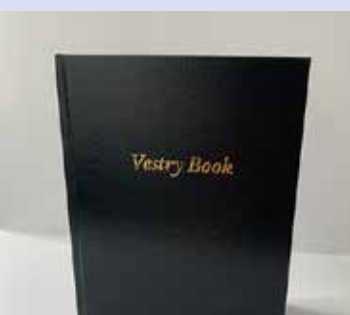
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“That isn’t necessarily going to immediately change a negotiating position, but longer term it shapes national ideas and policies ... Jesus doesn’t really shy away from those kind of realities, so neither should we.”

—Martha Jarvis

Anglicans hope to sway world leaders at COP30

Continued from p. 1

will the Anglican delegation to COP30, the Conference of Parties of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, to be held November 10-21 in Brazil, says Harper. He’s one of the Anglicans Archbishop Marinez Bassotto, primate of the Anglican Episcopal Church of Brazil, invited to bring spiritual and Indigenous perspectives to the gathering. Harper and other Anglican activists say there are good reasons why reforestation takes such a prominent place among the ways humans can address climate change.

Food and flame: damage and projects in Canada

According to data from Natural Resources Canada, wildfires across Canada had burned a total of about 8.8 million hectares of land in 2025 as of Sept. 17. That’s about three million more than in 2024, but still just over half as much as the 15 million hectares burned in 2023. That year, Canada’s wildfires were responsible for a 24 per cent increase in global tree cover loss outside the tropics, according to the World Resources Institute’s Global Forest Review. In the rest of the world, tree cover loss decreased overall by four per cent that year.

Harper, who travels frequently as part of his ministry to the Indigenous church, says he has seen the costs of that environmental damage in the lives of the people he ministers to. Some have had to move from homes in the paths of wildfires—often from reservations in remote areas where response crews are not always on hand—and are now living in cities instead. Others have seen damage and other changes in land they rely on for hunting, fishing and other needs, due both to the fires and to climate change.

As these fires—and the usual logging—continue to chew through forests across Canada, some Anglicans are taking on projects designed to restore and improve tree cover and health.

One such project is a food forest at St. Mary’s Church in Fredericton. Andrew Mathis, a warden at the church and its food forest lead, says the idea is for the forest to be a “living food bank,” growing edible fruit and nuts for locals to come harvest as needed. Volunteers gather any leftover produce and donate it to the brick-and-mortar foodbanks in the area. The forest is limited by growing season and the amount of land it has to work with, Matthis says, but adds, “Ideally, this is just a demonstration project for what could be a future network of community food forests throughout a city.”

There are about 30 other food forest projects in New Brunswick, he says, many at schools and thus unstaffed in the summer. But with collaboration and knowledge sharing, there’s strong potential for expansion, he says. St. Mary’s has recently succeeded in convincing the city of Fredericton to incorporate food forests into its urban forestry program, adding some welcome civic support to the hope for a city-wide network..

Meanwhile, in the diocese of Ottawa, Valerie Maier and Patrick Stephens, heads of the diocese’s Alongside Hope working group, created Branches of Hope, a campaign to plant trees in the Ottawa area, raising funds to plant even more in Uganda. Maier and Stephens said they were inspired by and worked with another



▲ **Bishop Anthony Poggo, secretary general of the Anglican Consultative Council, waters a Communion Forest tree in Mombasa, Kenya.**

PHOTO: DIOCESE OF MOMBASA IN THE ANGLICAN CHURCH OF KENYA

Harper says he has seen the costs of environmental damage in the lives of the people he ministers to. Some have had to move from homes in the paths of wildfires and are now living in cities instead. Others have seen damage and changes in land they rely on for hunting, fishing and other needs, due both to the fires and climate change.

Alongside Hope partner agency, St. Jude Family Projects, a Ugandan NGO which trains farmers there in sustainable and organic farming practices. Through the NGO, they heard of the increased rate of tree loss in Uganda, where the COVID-19 pandemic caused many people to move out of cities to rural properties where they relied on wood for cooking fires.

Leaders of the Ottawa project announced in spring 2024 they had given out 410 trees to be planted in the diocese of Ottawa and sponsored the planting of 23,062 trees in Uganda. These trees will be counted as part of the Communion Forest initiative, a program launched at 2022’s Lambeth Conference which encourages Anglicans and church organizations around the world to plant trees to be counted as part of one “virtual forest” as a way to honour creation and promote afforestation.

Deforestation has already had serious and far-reaching effects, especially in the Global South, says the Rev. Ken Gray, retired dean of St. Paul’s Cathedral in Kamloops, B.C. and current secretary of the Anglican Communion Environmental Network. He says many countries in Africa have lost trees rapidly due to exploitation by industry and growing populations. In some countries—Burundi, for example—most people depend on wood to cook. But cutting down trees for firewood leads to soil degradation, erosion, floods and droughts—effects which can destroy whole communities, he says.

The good news, he says, is that youth get involved in places like Burundi and Uganda, planting trees in the millions in projects like the ones Branches of Hope funded. “The scale at which they do reforestation there is huge, almost beyond our comprehension,” he says.

Canada has much to learn from their enthusiasm, he says.

What Anglicans are bringing to COP30

Encouraging global leaders to learn from the experiences of those most impacted by environmental damage is one of the stated goals of the Anglican Church’s participation in COP30. Martha Jarvis, the Anglican Communion’s permanent representative at the UN, says the church is working to bring forward the voices of people indigenous to the environments affected by climate change and environmental destruction.

The guests invited by Bassotto will join prayer services, marches, vigils and press conferences as part of the People’s

Summit, which happens in parallel with the gathering of world leaders. Jarvis says her job will include tying the issues those events raise in with the government negotiations through meetings with political leaders, coordination with COP30’s Indigenous caucus and connections with other ecumenical and interfaith coalitions.

Both she and Harper note that much of the discussion at COP meetings is about the business and financial interests impacted by action on climate change. That being the case, says Harper, Anglicans at the conference would do well to focus on communicating how the impacts they’ve seen affect economic concerns. Rising insurance rates, property damage from wildfires and job losses all mean less money circulating in the economy, he says.

“It ultimately affects the money itself,” he adds, “Everyone needs to be reminded that nothing on this earth belongs to us in this present moment, but we are borrowing it from our grandchildren and our great-grandchildren. And they inherit the mess ... we’ve created all because of our present greed.”

Much of the church’s power here, Jarvis says, comes from the fact that it represents ways of thinking and mobilizing action that stand apart from political and financial systems. The church points to ancient truths founded on a longing for restoration for all things and reveals the roots of the financial considerations in human selfishness, she says.

“That isn’t necessarily going to immediately change a negotiating position, but longer term it shapes national ideas and policies,” she says. “Jesus doesn’t really shy away from those kind of realities, so neither should we.”

Is planting trees the best way to care for the earth?

Not every Anglican believes reforestation is the most urgent issue Anglicans could be tackling, though. The Rev. Michael Van Dusen is a vocational deacon at the Church of St. Aidan in the Beach, Toronto, and a climate activist. In April 2024, he and eight other interfaith activists were arrested in a Royal Bank of Canada branch during a sit-in protest confronting the bank about its fossil fuel investments. In an email to the *Journal*, he said planting trees was awareness-raising; a good, even sacramental thing to do. However, he adds, “It is a gesture, not a solution. We have to do more to stop treating the atmosphere as a garbage dump for CO2.”

Harper and Jarvis largely agree. Still, Jarvis adds, though progress on fossil fuels may be frustratingly slow, populations become disillusioned and countries even pull out of the Paris Agreement on climate change, preservation and restoration of forests has a role to play. The Lungs of the Earth campaign, which the Anglican Communion launched this fall, calls Anglicans to take seriously the urgent need to preserve earth’s oceans, ice caps and forests as key elements of the planet’s ability to support life. If Anglicans really take the need to protect those ecosystems seriously, she says, they’ll push harder on emissions, plastic pollution and other damaging practises. Planting a tree isn’t the end of Anglicans’ responsibility, she says. But it is a visible, restorative, nature-first way to invest in the future. ■

ANGLICAN VOICES ▶



By Jess Tunggal

PEOPLE FIND JESUS in a lot of places, but I found Him in a spellbook. Growing up evangelical and queer, I was disenfranchised by a repressive and hypocritical church. Nevertheless, I thirsted for connection to the Divine. A meeting with a witch led me to discover a group whose love and openness made me feel spiritually at home for the first time.

Witchcraft, I learned, was not the stereotype of old women riding broomsticks. Rather, it was a vibrant community of people from all genders and backgrounds practicing *magick*—a term encompassing an enormous range of practices, from Norse rune reading to Appalachian horticulture and even Christian saint-work—outside the bounds of institutional religion. The beauty of witchcraft lies in its diversity of approach, which makes simple definitions difficult to pin down, but my own practice engaged with a number of pagan Anglo-Saxon gods.

As a witch, I always thought Christianity was a dead spirituality with nothing to offer. However, when one of my occult friends made the offhand comment that Yeshua of Nazareth was *also* a magician, a lightbulb went off in my head. The result was a spiritual journey, one where I rediscovered voices in the Christian mystic tradition that I'd never heard as an evangelical.

Now, I find myself in a unique position. I've returned to Christianity in the Anglican Communion, and while I no longer identify as a witch, I've reflected that the perspective I gained doing witchcraft has offered new ways of understanding the person and practice of Christ. In this spirit, I hope to foster dialogue between two communities that have been divided due to long histories of persecution and misunderstanding.

Creation is loved

Canadian Christianity is rooted in settler-colonial Christianity. Many of the early settlers believed non-Christian Indigenous people were “savages” to be civilized and converted, and the land was something God had given them to exploit.

We understand this in the Anglican Communion as we repent our sins against Indigenous peoples today. However, we must also question colonial Christianity's assumptions about the land in this process, such as the idea that the natural world is *merely* inanimate wilderness to be tamed and exploited.

Witches contribute to this conversation with an ancient proposal: that nature is not an *object* to dominate



▲ Returning to Christ from witchcraft helped the author see the mark of God as “not someplace far off but present in creation.”

PHOTO: CONTRIBUTED

but a *person* worthy of respect. In my own walk, I celebrated seasonal festivals in sacred forests, prayed alongside the trees and animals, and learned that humanity is not alone here on Earth. Through this *animist* framework, I renewed my spiritual relationship with creation by viewing the natural world as alive and spiritually active.

Returning to Christ with this viewpoint helped me see that the mark of God was not someplace far off but *present* in creation. Scripture tells us that God loves *all* creatures (Mat 10:29) and that all things sustain themselves through God (Acts 17:28). Seeing God in the mountains, the seas, and in our animal friends, I could no longer believe that the abuses Christians commit against creation were justified. We ask ourselves to see Christ in one another, but how differently would we act if we saw God's love in our non-human neighbours?

Christ, our ancestor

Raised in suburban Canada, I felt that I was alone in history. My life was fast-paced, but in the face of eternity I knew I was a tiny speck. I felt alienated, especially by the idea that my ancestors were distant, long-dead people, and I suspect I'm not alone.

Arriving in the neopagan community, I discovered that my forebears weren't quite so far away. Witches reclaim their ancestry through ritual. Take the Celtic tradition of Samhain, a time near the autumn equinox when the boundary between our lives and the Otherworld— a realm outside of time

inhabited by gods, spirits, and ancestors—is believed to thin. By celebrating these festivals, I experienced my ancestors as present, and knew that I was part of something much bigger.

When I learned that ancient Samhain is connected to the church's All Saints' Day, I discovered Christ anew, not only as a saviour, but as an ancient family member. Christ is our spiritual ancestor because He opened God's covenant lineage to all through His sacrifice. The Church breathes life into this reality through her traditions. Each week, we reaffirm creeds that Christians have recited for countless generations, reliving the story of Christ's Passion through our liturgy. These celebrations connect us to the spiritual ancestors who've died in Christ. More importantly however, they are why we can boldly call God our Father; we have been welcomed into a family with deep roots in history.

The nature of gifts

The God I was taught about as a kid was legalistic. My parents said that God gave us laws to demonstrate why we deserve punishment, but we *wouldn't* be punished if we accepted the “gift” of Jesus. This sounded eerily like a hostage exchange and made me understandably suspicious. Eventually, I concluded that this dynamic was emotionally abusive. Threatening to hurt someone if they don't accept your gift is wrong. So I left the church.

Witchcraft challenged my view of gifts through the concept of *reciprocity*, the idea that the “shape” of a gift isn't simply one-way. Giving and receiving gifts from the gods in a two-way *cycle* is a natural show of appreciation. This is why witches often say they “work with” a deity—the relationship of exchange is emphasized, not the obligation of a transaction.

Learning this helped me accept God's gifts. In a *transaction*, the weight of obligation and threat of punishment bind us. We give and receive for essentially selfish reasons, trying to extract value or preserve ourselves. But examining God as a reciprocal being, I harnessed a force which is far more powerful (Jo 6:26). This is the gift of *love*, inflamed in our hearts by Christ (Jo 3:16). This gift flows from God through us and back to Christ in by giving to our communities (Ma 25:37-40). ■

Jess Tunggal is a digital humanities academic and writer based in the diocese of Edmonton who is pursuing a career in clinical counseling. They love writing about Christian mysticism, Western esotericism and the new digital world.

LETTERS ▶

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



PHOTO: SYNDI PILAR/SHUTTERSTOCK

Protestors at a 2023 rally in New York call for the return of Israeli hostages.

Where is the outcry over the actions and intent of Hamas?

Mr. Metzger (“Israel is committing genocide in Gaza,” Letters, September, p. 4) calls for us “to stand for justice and for the oppressed and the marginalized.” I agree. Did Mr. Metzger write criticizing Hamas for shelling and killing Israeli citizens in October 2023? I must have missed that letter.

Do Mr. Metzger and others even remember why Israel was (re)founded—as a homeland for people of the Jewish faith? It was in 1948, because some people of a pious Christian land had sworn to eliminate the Jews. Their effort failed but they did have some success, exterminating an estimated six million.

Is the government of Israel perfect and noble in all its dealings? No, but Hamas leaders have publicly stated their desire to exterminate the Jews. How would your government respond to a regime which publicly states it will seek to exterminate all Anglicans?

Sheila Welbergen
Winnipeg

ARCHBISHOP
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WRITES ▶



Carrying the spark of love into a colder month

By Shane Parker

I AM FOND of November, a month when nature shifts from the richness of autumn, with its pungent smells, colourful leaves, golden days and temperate weather to a kind of stark, minimalist beauty.

The readings in our lectionary in this season before Advent frequently take on an urgent tone, reminding us of the need to attend to earthly things so we are ready for the heavenly things that will come upon us suddenly and unexpectedly. There are some spectacularly apocalyptic passages in the last Sundays after Pentecost, which often bring to mind some of the frightening scenes we recall on Remembrance Day (not to mention some of the current scenarios we hear of today, concerning climate, nuclear and economic threats).

But November in the land where we dwell is oblivious to all these things. It is a month that prepares the earth for winter, slowly freezing the earth as it becomes covered in a new layer of leaves, under skies that are often solemn or bright with sunlight that comes from a sharper angle in the horizon. There is less shade without the foliage of deciduous trees when the sun is shining, and more sky to see on grey days.

I love cool, crisp, solemn November days when tree trunks stand tall and



▲ “A nice roadway or forest path, even a city sidewalk or park, becomes a bit magical and more contemplative with a touch of November frost,” writes the author.

PHOTO: SHANE PARKER

hoarfrost gathers on branches, dry leaves, needles, and the stalks of grasses and plants. Walking on such sombre days is invigorating, with little fear of overheating or sunburn. A nice roadway or forest path, even a city sidewalk or park, becomes a bit magical and more contemplative with a touch of November frost.

November is a pathway into winter as the triptych of spring, summer and fall slowly closes and we are drawn into the last days of the year. Perhaps that is why some of the lectionary readings which remind us of the shortness of life and the imminence of death become more vivid for us, we who live on land where November is so pronounced.

Frequently, we will hear Jesus speaking about very unsettling scenarios (some eerily familiar), but he tells his followers to take heart, because challenging situations create opportunities to testify to God’s powerful love.

He tells his followers to be unafraid of moving forward—to move along the path of life with confidence and trust—even with curiosity and a sense of adventure, because, he says, “not a hair of your head will perish. By your endurance you will gain your souls.”

At our baptism we were signed with the cross and made Christ’s own forever. When hoarfrost appears around us, when the skies are filled with solemn portent, when the air starts to bite the skin, it means a new season is dawning; and when the world seems to be filled with scary things, it means God’s love is needed.

Each one of us carries a spark of the fire of God’s love within us—a love that abides in us now and will receive us when we die. So stay warm in heart and spirit when the chill winds of fear and foreboding blow against you; steadfastly seek to share God’s love in all you think, all you do, all you say, and all you pray, every day of your life; and walk gently on the path God opens before you. ■

Archbishop Shane Parker is the primate of the Anglican Church of Canada.

FEATHER
AND SAGE ▶



Faith, the seeking of truth beyond truth

By Chris Harper

FEATHER: Almighty, today we the children of your creation lift our prayers of thanksgiving, for your faithfulness, grace and mercy. In our brokenness we see only as deep as the mirror before us allows. We hesitate when we are called to go forth, we are easily distracted and we divide more than we mend. Yet you see us through the wide lens of your love and peace. Your faithfulness remains so that you walk with us in every step of the journey. For this we lift the prayer of praise, and we ask your guiding Spirit to bless us that we might go this day with clear eyes, open hearts and tongues of truth. This we pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.

SAGE: One of the great blessings and challenges in my ministry as national Indigenous Anglican archbishop is travelling. It’s a blessing because in my journeys I get to see the diversity and beauty of this vast land and its people;



PHOTO: TORY CHEMISTRY

it’s a challenge because it means being away from home and kin. But the blessing always outweighs the challenge! As I look out my airplane window, I marvel at the surreal vision revealed before me. The clouds create vast forms of faraway landscapes, with ever-shifting cities taking shape in the soft mountains of vapor reaching to the blue beyond blue. All the while I acknowledge that back on the ground is the reality of the human condition—the joys and tears, need and mercies, brokenness and healing, life and death. Sometimes it seems that the beauty and function of the Almighty’s creation are but a whisper in the storm of humanity. Amidst the storm, Creator offers community, connection and healing beyond understanding, but too often we in our humanity rush around without seeing, so afraid of losing the moment that we do not appreciate it; we reach for more, only for it to leave our grasp and our circle.

The journey of life and faith is the great gift given to all; life is meant to be

full, glorious and blessed. Faith is the seeking of deep truth beyond truth and grace beyond comprehension. Binding it all is the transformative love revealed through the sacrificial love of Christ, who in obedience died once and for all that we might come into communion with the Father and be one in peace. But just as we need to step away from the mirror of self and immediacy to see the beauty that is all around, in all creation, we also need to step away to glimpse the greater glory of the Creator. Maybe in so doing we too will then bend the knee in humility and prayer, embracing the present, embracing the other beside us and going forward in Christ and peace. May love and peace go with and before you, may you be blessed to be a blessing to others, and may you always rise up out of the valley of darkness to soar in the beauty of God the Creator. Amen. ■

Archbishop Chris Harper is national Indigenous archbishop of the Anglican Church of Canada.

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FAITH AND CULTURE ▶



“Our vergers were having conversations with the crew every day, kind of demystifying church to the average person who maybe for whatever reason hasn’t darkened the door of a church in ages and has all kinds of assumptions or stereotypes.”

—The Rev. Helen Dunn

TV shoot meant mission, ministry for church

Continued from p. 1

their space for a production.

“Folks in the community rely on this building and rely on the ministry that takes place here,” says Dunn. “So we do really want to make sure that it’s possible for these ministries to continue for the duration of the filming.”

Representatives of “Megasword,” which was actually a code name for *The Last of Us*, an HBO show about the human drama of a fungus-based zombie apocalypse, were thoroughly respectful of the congregation’s concerns, says Dunn. They offered to pay, to each of the groups that would usually rent out the church’s space during the time they were filming, the cost of their rental for that week. The production company also found ways to add value, she says: it sent a guitar ministry group on a field trip and even built a dance floor in a nearby tennis court for a creative dance group that normally met at the church.

“They were really community-minded and each of the user groups were thrilled with the arrangement that HBO made for them,” Dunn says.

The filming also, she says, gave the church an opportunity to minister to film workers. For one thing, the church was helping a production that was providing work for crew members during a rocky time in the film industry. But it also created opportunities for people who wouldn’t normally set foot in a church to have an encounter with their parish, she said.

Several members of the church were employed in supervising the production’s use of the building, watching for any damage and consulting on respectful and safe practices. That provided opportunities for them to connect with members of the crew, says Dunn.

“Our vergers were having conversations with the crew every day, kind of demystifying church to the average person who maybe for whatever reason hasn’t darkened the door of a church in ages and has all kinds of assumptions or stereotypes, rightly or wrongly,” she says. “There were all kinds of reports of conversations that happened that week and interest in this little tiny log cabin church that has a gay priest and a bunch of women in clerical collars: ‘What is this place?’”

It even drew attention from neighbours, says Dunn. Once a local man took it on himself to stand near the church and assure people changes being made to the property were only temporary—the statue of an anchor would be put back when the filming was finished. He made clear he wasn’t interested in going inside the church himself once the filming was over, she says, “but still saw himself as part of it.”

The Rev. Tim Haughton is the rector at Little Trinity Church in Toronto, which hosts several film projects every year. Those productions net it around \$30,000 to \$50,000 per year, he estimates, which is a sizeable supplement to the donations that largely make up its annual \$1.2 million budget.

Little Trinity occasionally appears onscreen, but even more often rents out its space for equipment storage while productions shoot nearby. Haughton says the community-building aspect of film rentals is not top of mind for his church. Little Trinity has a full-time facilities coordinator who liaises with crews when they are on site and otherwise keeps film rentals as separate as possible from



▲ A scene shot in Toronto’s Little Trinity Church shows Firecracker (Misty Tucker Gray) praying in an over-the-top parody of a religious political ad in Season 4 of Amazon MGM Studios’ *The Boys*.

PHOTO: AMAZON MGM STUDIOS

“There was one where they wanted Jesus on a crucifix in front of our [stained glass] window, and they wanted blood coming out of the eyes because somebody had sinned or whatever. And I was like, ‘No. Not happening in here.’”

—Kelly McDonough

congregational life to minimize disruption. A larger part of the thinking around film rentals, he says, is consideration about the content of programs and movies that the church might appear in.

Little Trinity has served as backdrop for productions from 1994’s biblical apocalypse movie *Left Behind* to 2023 Arnold Schwarzenegger action comedy series *FUBAR*, to R-rated superhero parody *The Boys* and, most recently, an episode of *Law and Order*. Often, agreeing to the church’s appearing in a production is a matter of some negotiation, says Haughton. He’ll usually ask to see the portion of the script that would take place in the church and review it to consider how it would represent issues relevant to the faith.

Notably, *FUBAR* contains an extended shootout in the church and *The Boys* has a scene in which a character gives an over-the-top parody of a hyperpoliticized speech exploiting religion and patriotism to prop up the plans of an evil corporation. While some might find this kind of material controversial, Haughton says he finds value in participating in a conversation criticizing a certain brand of “guns and God” faith culture.

Some aspects of evangelical culture over the past several decades have “grievously” soured Christianity’s public image, he adds. “Sadly, I think those things need to be critiqued and named,” he says. “It’s as much a part of our story as it is American evangelicalism’s story. So anything that stirs up the conversation about it, I don’t think it’s a bad thing.”

The church has negotiated with *Law and Order*, which filmed an episode involving a serial killer hiding bodies on church grounds, to avoid using recognizable parts of the building’s façade and thereby associating it with violence in the minds of viewers. Haughton adds that he might have turned down *Left Behind* if it had been filmed during his tenure due to concerns about its unbiblical eschatology. And he says the church turned down a sketch show that wanted to shoot a joke portraying faith as useless and churches better converted into condos.

Gae Keyzer, the church’s parish administrator, also recalls a production that was turned down because it involved depicting vampires, a representation of supernatural evil, inside the church. She also adds that while the scene in *FUBAR* involved a fair bit of shooting, it also set a wedding in the church, which is something the church is happy to be associated with.

Leaders and congregants at St. Clement’s also had questions about *The Last of Us*, says Dunn. What if they wanted to film monster scenes in the sanctuary? Could that contribute to children who watched it associating frightening images

with church?

As it turned out, the location scout was worried that the church would object to the scene because it involved two women sharing a kiss, to which Dunn replied, “So what you’re saying is, you’re wondering if my wife and I are available?” she laughs. “Again, another opportunity to demystify what goes on in churches.”

Much of the hard work of handling rentals at Little Trinity belongs to Kelly McDonough, the facilities coordinator, says Haughton. McDonough has experience working in film herself, and thus, she says, knows both where to advertise the church’s availability to location scouts and how to maximize utility to them once they arrive. She will often provide a full tour of the church’s campus, making suggestions for other places companies might film or use for storage—thereby both helping build a reputation for the church as a film-friendly location and earning it extra income.

It’s a lot to take on, though, she cautions. Shooting on church grounds means careful planning about exactly what parts of the site will be in use, what the requirements will be for the space and how to organize it around the church’s regular ministries. It means having someone on site the whole time to supervise the usage, accommodate the crew’s needs and prevent damage to the building. And sometimes it means negotiating on-the-day changes to what the crew wants to depict.

“There was one where they wanted Jesus on a crucifix in front of our [stained glass] window, and they wanted blood coming out of the eyes because somebody had sinned or whatever. And I was like, ‘No. Not happening in here.’ I’ve been around the parishioners enough to know what I think will get their ire up, and I’m protective of them,” she says.

McDonough is happy to do that work in addition to her other responsibilities, often working 12-hour days. But she cautions that any church considering looking for film rental income should prepare for how much work it will take and be sure to have a good advocate on site to stand up for the safety of the building and the needs of congregants and neighbours.

Still, she adds, the extra revenue can be a big help if you can get it. Little Trinity recently had a century-old sewage pipe collapse under its building, which will cost the church about \$30,000 in repairs. That’s about the same as the church makes in film revenue, McDonough points out, allowing the church to do the repairs without dipping into ministry money.

Likewise, Dunn notes that while filming for the first time was a major disruption to the usual rhythms of St. Clement’s community life and therefore likely wouldn’t be something they’d repeat several times a year, it won’t be the last time, either.

“It’s certainly something we’d welcome every other year,” she says. St. Clement’s just happens to be a great likeness to a church that appears in the video game *The Last of Us* is based on, so it’s not yet clear whether it will be a regular event or just one really good fit. So far, the parish has one inquiry from HBO rival Apple TV+, she says, though that one did not result in a deal. ■

REGIONAL
NEWS ►

Western Newfoundland protesters continue to demand return of fired dean as diocese plans election of new bishop

Matthew Puddister
STAFF WRITER

If the Rev. Catherine Short, former dean of the Cathedral of St. John the Evangelist in Corner Brook, Nfld. is to be re-instated, it would have to wait until after a new bishop is elected, Archdeacon Charlene Laing, the diocese of Western Newfoundland's executive archdeacon told *The Anglican Journal* in early October, shortly before this issue went to press.

The diocese has no bishop after the Oct. 1 resignation of former Bishop John Organ, on the advice of the provincial House of Bishops. Laing said any re-instatement of Short would have to be by a new bishop. The diocese is planning an election to decide who Organ's successor will be, she said, but she declined to give the date of the planned electoral synod.

The Rev. Kris Gosse, whom Organ had appointed as dean after he had fired Short, resigned in September. Organ announced at the end of a Sept. 14 worship service that Gosse had withdrawn as dean after three weeks. The bishop blamed protesters who had called for Short's reinstatement as dean, accusing them in a Facebook post of "intimidation and harassment."

"My appointment of a priest of our diocese who applied, and who with faithfulness and courage stepped into the position, was immediately met with protesters confronting him in person and through a very upsetting social media and email campaign against him," Organ said in an email to parishioners.

Organ said Laing would take over Gosse's responsibilities in the weeks ahead.

Neither Gosse nor Organ had responded to interview requests as of press time. However, in a Sept. 17 farewell letter to St. John the Evangelist's congregation, Gosse said he made the decision to resign after much prayer, discernment and counsel.

"As you are aware, the past weeks have not been without difficulty," Gosse said. "A number of concerns and protests arose following my appointment, and while I believe in the value of open dialogue and accountability in the life of the Church, the level of sustained pressure has made it clear that my presence has become a source of division rather than unity. That grieves me deeply, because I came here not to lead from a place of controversy, but to serve, to listen, and to help build up the Body of Christ in this place."

"After prayerful reflection, I have discerned that remaining in this position at this time would not serve the health or mission of the cathedral. I have always believed that leadership in the Church is about service, not self."

The controversy that has roiled St. John the Evangelist stretches back to Jan. 19, when Organ announced in a livestreamed worship service that he had fired Short, the cathedral's dean and rector since 2018. The bishop referred to personal conflicts with Short and made other allegations, including that she had made "threatening" social media posts.

Protests followed calling for Organ to reinstate Short and to resign as bishop. The entire vestry resigned in protest.



▲ **Protesters call for the reinstatement of the Rev. Catherine Short as dean of the Cathedral of St. John the Evangelist in Corner Brook, Nfld.**

PHOTO: DEBORAH HOWE
VIA FACEBOOK

Short filed safe church complaints against Organ.

Archbishop David Edwards, metropolitan of the ecclesiastical province of Canada, found in a June 13 response to Short's complaints that Organ had engaged in discriminatory practice regarding her employment status, "emotional abuse" and bullying. He called for Organ to re-instate Short's license to practice ministry as dean and rector of St. John the Evangelist; to apologize to the dean, congregation and diocese; and to take sabbatical leave until his Oct. 1 resignation.

Organ ignored the metropolitan's recommendations and said in a June 25 letter to the diocese that he would continue as bishop. However, in an Aug. 26 letter Organ reversed course and said he would resign Oct. 1. Edwards released a statement that said by resigning, Organ was following the advice of the provincial House of Bishops.

Short told the *Anglican Journal* she

was unsure what Gosse's resignation as dean meant going forward. "I know it was inevitable because we all knew it was the wrong appointment," Short said. "But the bishop has not made another appointment and he's got another week here, so I'm not sure if he will or won't."

Now receiving employment insurance, Short criticized Organ's accusations that protesters had intimidated Gosse and his family.

"You're looking at 70 and 80-year-olds outside the church leaned up against a fence with their signs, not interacting at all [with Gosse and his family] or speaking to any of them ... Their most dangerous weapons would be their walking sticks."

Glynda Seaborn, a St. John the Evangelist parishioner and member of the Facebook group Anglicans (and Others) for Accountability and Justice—which parishioners formed in response to Organ's actions, and which calls for greater transparency and accountability within the Anglican Church of Canada—praised Gosse for stepping down as dean.

"While others convinced themselves that God called them to ignore this challenging situation and turn away from the obvious harm being done, Reverend Kris Gosse found the moral courage to act with integrity," Seaborn said. ■

Sean Frankling also contributed to this report.

“My appointment of a priest ... was immediately met with protesters confronting him in person and through a very upsetting social media and email campaign against him.”

—Bishop John Organ

“You’re looking at 70 and 80-year-olds outside the church leaned up against a fence with their signs ... Their most dangerous weapons would be their walking sticks.”

—The Rev. Catherine Short

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BRICKS AND
MORTAR ▶

Building a new St. Anne's

Options mulled for Toronto church destroyed by 2024 blaze; four artworks now restored

Matthew Puddister
STAFF WRITER

St. Anne's Anglican Church in Toronto, which featured unique Byzantine Revival architecture and irreplaceable artwork by members of the Group of Seven before its destruction by fire on June 9, 2024, will be rebuilt as a more modest structure within the remains of the old church building, its interim priest-in-charge told the *Anglican Journal*—fulfilling purposes currently split between two separate buildings, the former rectory and the parish hall.

Meanwhile, the parish has also managed to preserve three paintings and part of a mosaic that were damaged in the fire but not destroyed. Following a restoration process, St. Anne's has now received the artwork.

Since the fire, the congregation has moved to worship in the adjacent parish hall. The Rev. Judith Alltree, who served as interim priest-in-charge at St. Anne's from June 15 to Sept. 15, 2025, said the parish received a letter in early September from Heritage Toronto, a city agency that seeks to preserve local heritage buildings. The letter said the parish must keep all existing remains from the old church building—which include its exterior walls and main entrance—as part of the rebuilding project.

The parish will therefore incorporate the rebuilt church inside the “footprint” of the old church, Alltree said. What that will look like is still up in the air; for example, the parish might incorporate a garden area between the outer walls of the old church and those of the new church.

Knowing what the base size of the new building will be allows St. Anne's to better plan a new structure in accordance with its needs, she said.

“We will not be needing an 800-seat sanctuary, not being a huge church any longer,” Alltree said. “We don't need that big a building. We can get all that we need in the footprint of what remains. So that's really good news.”

Explaining what she meant by “good news”, Alltree said the original St. Anne's—which the federal government designated a national historic site—was a massive building constructed in the early 20th century, when many Anglican churches were built to house very large congregations.

“St. Anne's was—and continues to be—a huge presence in the Parkdale neighbourhood, both physically and for other reasons, such as the many outreach ministries,” Alltree said. “Our outreach actually continues, even though our huge building does not.”

When looking at plans for the rebuilding project, she said, the parish realized it could contain all its needs for the new church—including offices, meeting rooms, worship space, kitchen—inside the footprint of the old building. That contrasts to how it has used its property since the fire, accommodating offices in both the ministry centre, i.e. the former rectory, and the parish hall, where it houses its worship space and hosts community dinners and other events.

St. Anne's in September was overseeing



▲ **Christ in the Garden by Hamish Stewart-Treviranus, one of the recovered murals saved from the fire that destroyed the old St. Anne's Anglican Church. Damaged by the inferno, the painting is shown here in its current condition after restoration efforts.**

PHOTO: HANNAH JOHNSTON

surveys of the area to determine how many layers into the ground are necessary to hold space such as offices. Alltree said the parish would be looking at designs for the rebuilt church during the two months leading up to Toronto's diocesan synod in November, along with getting necessary construction permissions from the city and diocese.

“We do not know what the design will be like,” Alltree said. “In other words, we're not saying we're going to rebuild exactly as it looked like before the fire. No Byzantine dome roof ... That's not most likely going to happen. It hearkens back to a different era and it would be difficult to [rebuild] that.”

Also preserved, along with the exterior of the old church, are three pieces of artwork that were saved from the fire—“not in great condition, but they were saved,” Alltree said, adding, “It is astonishing, given the intensity of the fire, that they survived at all.”

On Sept. 11, St. Anne's received back the artwork, which had been undergoing restoration, for the congregation to examine. The art includes parts of a cross mosaic and three murals: *Christ in the Garden* by Hamish Stewart-Treviranus, *The Tempest* by J.E.H. MacDonald of the Group of Seven and *Healing of the Palsied Man* by Neil McKechnie.

“What was amazing was the murals were all found at the eastern end of the building, the opposite end of where they had been mounted,” Alltree said. “Almost as if they were being protected from the worst of the fire.”

Insurance covers the cost of restoring the building, but not the artwork. As a result, the congregation will do more fundraising and applying for grants in the coming years. Repurposing some of its land for projects such as low-income housing could also provide a potential revenue stream, Alltree added.

Historic Winnipeg church saved from wrecking ball now studying repair, redevelopment

Matthew Puddister
STAFF WRITER

Winnipeg's 141-year-old Holy Trinity Anglican Church, recognized by the federal government as a national historic site, is in the final stages of a heritage rehabilitation study carried out by two local firms to look at potential repairs originally estimated to cost \$7 million.

Holy Trinity faced possible demolition in September 2024. Vestry members at the time feared structural collapse and were looking at nearby sites as alternative sites of worship. However, speaking to the *Anglican Journal* this summer, now-Bishop of Rupert's Land Naboth Manzongo, who was incumbent of Holy Trinity and bishop-elect of Rupert's Land at the time, said the city had not condemned the building or labelled it a safety risk, and the congregation was still worshipping there. In a Sept. 12 update, Manzongo told the *Journal* the heritage rehabilitation study was in its last phase of research.

Manzongo said the need for potential repairs stems from the church shifting due to the construction of adjacent office buildings in the 1960s. As a result, the building is now starting to crack in places.

The two firms Holy Trinity signed a memorandum of understanding with to conduct the study are Monteyne Architecture, serving as architectural consultants; and CentreVenture Development Corporation, which describes itself as an “arm's-length agency” of the City of Winnipeg that specializes in encouraging development of the downtown core through public-private partnerships.

On April 25, CentreVenture announced it would support the first phase of a heritage rehabilitation study for Holy Trinity. As part of the deal, CentreVenture is providing a \$107,000 grant to Holy Trinity, covering half of the \$214,000 total cost of the study. Monteyne, for its part, has brought in consultants from the business world, the City of Winnipeg, and those experienced in development projects across Manitoba as well as heritage projects, Manzongo said.

“We have people who have an interest in faith properties, on how they can partner with faith properties ... This study is not only about redevelopment of the sanctuary itself of the church, but redevelopment in terms of the whole property,” which also includes the parking lot and an addition to the church built in the 1960s, Manzongo said.

The rehabilitation study will provide new estimates on costs to repair the church, verifying whether the \$7-million figure is correct, and options to fund those repairs. ■

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‘We’re going to rebuild that church ... That’s giving focus to the parish’

Continued from p. 8

Deciding to move forward with the rebuilding project has revitalized St. Anne’s, she said. “We’re going to rebuild that church. That’s exciting and that’s giving focus to the parish.”

The Rev. Hannah Johnston, who took over as priest-in-charge at St. Anne’s in mid-September, told the *Journal* in an update Oct. 2, not long before this issue went to press, that a discernment

When looking at plans for the rebuilding project, Alltree says, the parish realized it could contain all its needs for the new church—including offices, meeting rooms, worship space, kitchen—inside the footprint of the old building.

committee made up of St. Anne’s parishioners, lay people, and a representative from the diocese of Toronto continued to meet every two weeks with architects to discuss possible options and space use for different ministries. Any decisions about plans or proposals would be presented to the diocesan synod council, Johnston said, and the discernment committee was scheduled to meet

with bishops from the Anglican diocese of Toronto later in October.

The *Journal* reached out to Bishop Kevin Robertson, the suffragan bishop overseeing the area that includes St. Anne’s who has been in contact with Johnston on rebuilding efforts, but had not yet received a reply as of press time.

Up from the ashes

Johnston said as of Oct. 2, St. Anne’s had still not heard back from Ontario’s fire marshal, part of the province’s Ministry of the Solicitor General, about the cause of the fire that destroyed the old church. “We’ve been emailing every week for about a year to ask if there’s any update or if they can release part of the report and we have yet to hear anything from them,” she said.

The Rev. Don Beyers, incumbent and rector of St. Anne’s until June 15, 2025, said in early June that the year after the fire was a testament to the resilience of his parish, as members sought to re-establish themselves following the destruction of the old church building.

In the immediate aftermath, volunteers worked to set up tables and chairs so the congregation could hold Sunday worship outdoors in the St. Anne’s parking lot. The choir looked for other spaces where it could practice singing. Nearby St. Thomas’s Anglican Church lent the parish liturgical vessels. Within two weeks, the congregation began holding worship within the St. Anne’s parish hall.

The fire investigation lasted about a month. Most of the remainder of 2024, Beyers said, involved stabilization of cleanup and the ruins left.

“The [work] crews were amazing—were so good about trying to preserve whatever artistic element that they could ... They delicately went through everything ... They were even trying to save pieces of stained glass that, although fragile, were miraculously not destroyed by the fire.”

Through that delicate approach, he added, the crews also managed to find pieces of artwork by the Group of Seven members, preserving what they could.

October 2024 saw the next stage of work: ensuring that the ruins of St. Anne’s were protected from the elements over the winter months. Measures included filling in the basement with dirt to keep the foundation warm through the winter, placing housewrap over interior walls and capping brickwork to prevent water from flowing into holes, which would have damaged the building through expansion upon freezing.

“I loved talking to the crews ... With the demolition crew, the cleanup crews, the heritage groups, what amazed me is though many of them were not necessarily persons of faith, there was almost this sacred sense about what they were doing,” Beyers said.

“They knew that what they were doing was an important act. They demonstrated the utmost respect and I would almost use the word ‘reverence’ for what they were doing. It was quite moving.”

In December, the discernment committee began its work of planning rebuilding efforts, guided by its architectural advisor—consulting with parishioners on what ministries they thought were important should St. Anne’s build a new church, as well as with community partners such as LOFT.

After the fire, choir member Isabella Favaro launched a fundraising campaign through GoFundMe to help rebuild St. Anne’s. As of Oct. 2, 2025, the campaign had raised \$50,097, more than halfway towards its \$100,000 goal.

Beyers expressed gratitude to Favaro, while noting her GoFundMe was a private initiative and that St. Anne’s itself had not yet launched an official fundraising campaign. In the meantime, the parish had also received thousands of dollars in donations from other groups and Christian communities, with Beyers noting strong support by Roman Catholics in particular.

Parish in discussions with community partners to re-imagine property—but priority is rebuilding church

Speaking to the *Anglican Journal* in late August, Alltree said it was clear from discussions with parish members that while housing was important, their primary function was as a parish church and their primary goal was to rebuild the church as soon as possible.

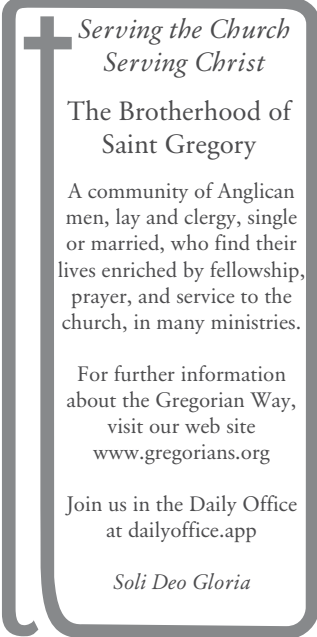
Johnston said in October that in addition to the rebuilding of the church, the discernment committee was looking at plans for affordable housing proposals on the site that would help finance reconstruction.

“Synod council will need to approve the development plan for the entire site in order to fund the building of the church,” Johnston said. “So the two things are inherently linked together.”

The parish’s current focus, however, remained on figuring out dimensions and space use for the church itself and drawing up initial plans to present to the St. Anne’s congregation and then to synod council, she said. ■

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December BIBLE READINGS

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| ☐ | 14 | Matthew 11:1-15 |
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| ☐ | 16 | Micah 2 |
| ☐ | 17 | Micah 3 |
| ☐ | 18 | Micah 4:8-5:9 |
| ☐ | 19 | Micah 5:10-6:16 |
| ☐ | 20 | Micah 7 |
| ☐ | 21 | Matthew 1:18-25 |
| ☐ | 22 | Titus 1:1-2:5 |
| ☐ | 23 | Titus 2:6-3:15 |
| ☐ | 24 | Luke 2:1-20 |
| ☐ | 25 | Isaiah 62 |
| ☐ | 26 | Acts 6 |
| ☐ | 27 | John 21:20-25 |
| ☐ | 28 | Hebrews 2 |
| ☐ | 29 | Psalms 148 |
| ☐ | 30 | 1 Chronicles 29:10-30 |
| ☐ | 31 | Numbers 6:22-27 |

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is an innovative Anglican college in Sudbury, Ontario offering creative programs in Theology. Largely through distance education, the School of Theology offers courses at the certificate and diploma levels, as well as a Bachelor of Theology. Thorneloe University has 58 single rooms in its community-focused residence, which is open to students at Laurentian. For more information, please contact the President of Thorneloe University at: president@thorneloe.ca Website: www.thorneloe.ca

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CHURCH AND STATE ▶



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“Seeing people praying in the streets, in public parks, is not something we want in Quebec. When we want to pray, we got to a church, we go to a mosque, but not in public places.”

—François Legault



PHOTO: CONTRIBUTED

“If it weren’t so unsettling in how it’s another demonstration of government overreach and a deep interference into individuals’ and communities’ fundamental rights, it would be comical. But it’s not. It’s really troubling.”

—Bishop Bruce Myers

Bill ‘a very clear message to Islamists’: Legault

Continued from p. 1

Rights. He described the proposed prayer ban as an attempt by an unpopular government to distract the public.

“This offers an easy opportunity to divert the electorate’s attention away from this government’s unpopularity and some of the scandals it’s mired in and towards something that appeals to a significant portion of their base of support, which is attacking religion and religious groups,” Myers says. “It’s proven a winning formula for them in the past.”

The planned law fits with the government’s “overall programme of aggressive secularism,” Myers says, but “takes it much further than any other government in the West has ever proposed going.”

A poll by the Angus Reid Institute released Sept. 9 found Premier François Legault’s support at a record low, with 22 per cent of Quebecers—one in five—approving of him and 72 per cent saying they do not support him, making Legault the least popular premier in Canada.

Legault said in December that he would consider using the notwithstanding clause, which allows Canada’s Parliament or provincial governments to limit certain Charter rights for up to five years, as part of an effort to send “a very clear message to Islamists.”

“Seeing people praying in the streets, in public parks, is not something we want in Quebec,” Legault said, adding, “When we want to pray, we go to a church, we go to a mosque, but not in public places.”

In a Sept. 30 speech to Quebec’s National Assembly, Legault offered further context for his proposed bill. He described the rise of “politico-religious groups that are attacking some of our common values, such as secularism,” adding, “Let’s be honest, it is mainly radical Islamists who are attacking these values with the most intensity.”

“I want to be very clear: I am not targeting Quebecers of Muslim faith or who are from Muslim countries,” Legault said. “I’m talking about radical Islamists, a group of people who are trying by all means to impose their values, to challenge our values and in particular women’s right to equality.”

“We must be very clear about this, we will not let anyone attack the freedom dearly acquired by Quebec women over decades, ever. So, I am announcing to you that the government will introduce a new bill to strengthen the secularism of the state and will take all possible means to counter the attacks on our common values.”

Law would ‘contravene basic human rights’: Myers

Myers responded, “If the government bakes the notwithstanding clause into this bill, as it has done with previous legislation, they’re effectively admitting that they know they’re proposing a law that contravenes basic human rights



▲ Supporters of Palestine pray at a demonstration on Parliament Hill, Ottawa, Oct. 15, 2023.

PHOTO: REUTERS/
ISMAIL SHAKIL

and freedoms as laid out in the federal charter.”

While the public would need to wait for the bill to be introduced to see its content, Myers says, the government’s plans raise a number of questions.

“What constitutes prayer?” he asks. “Who’s going to make that determination?”

“How’s it going to be enforced? ... Roving provincial prayer police?” he adds. “Is [there] going to be a public prayer hotline that people can call if they see someone purportedly praying in public? If it weren’t so unsettling in how it’s another demonstration of government overreach and a deep interference into individual and communities of fundamental rights, it would be comical. But it’s not. It’s really troubling.”

If the government’s intent is to respond to hateful speech at gatherings that could be considered prayerful, Myers says, laws already exist against hate speech and unlawful public assemblies.

Banning prayer in public would have an immediate effect on Anglicans in Quebec, Myers says. He points to the annual Good Friday walk in Quebec City, which brings together local Christians from across denominations. The walk includes readings from the Passion narrative, singing hymns and praying in public. “Is that going to be banned?” he asks.

He points to the annual spring blessing of fishing boats, crews and equipment, a public ceremony that take place in port communities across Quebec. “These are rituals that have been a part of those communities’ lives for generations,” Myers says.

He cites the blessing of pets and animals each fall around the Feast of St. Francis, as in one eastern township where the blessing takes place outdoors near a local farmer’s market. “People are invited to bring their pets

and they love doing that,” Myers says. “Is that going to be banned?”

“Like a lot of really bad ideas. I don’t think this one has been particularly well thought out by the people who are framing this proposed law. And it’s going to have all sorts of unintended consequences and collateral damage for all sorts of communities, even if it’s really intended to target one community in particular.”

The proposed law is “something that all citizens of Quebec, whether they are active participants in a faith tradition or not, should be concerned about because it represents a further erosion of what are really fundamental human rights,” Myers says.

Bishop-elect of Montreal Victor-David Mbuyi Bipungo also opposes the law and says he agrees with Myers and Roman Catholic Archbishop of Montreal Christian Lépine, who said in an open letter that banning public prayer would be like “forbidding thought itself.”

“I can’t imagine that everyone who can pray public publicly could be treated as a criminal,” Mbuyi Bipungo says. “It’s not right.”

“I’m surprised and I’m disappointed because I’m feeling that as a Christian, as a believer, I’m considered as a criminal,” he adds. “It’s not understandable to me ... We must stand up and fight against this misunderstanding of what being a believer means today.”

Mbuyi Bipungo expresses concern about the scope of the ban and acts it would criminalize, which he says threaten freedom of religion and expression. “Can we say that yoga exercises in the park could be considered as a [form of] prayer?” he asks.

The *Anglican Journal* reached out for comment from Roberge’s office, but had not received a response as of press time. ■

For our beloved church



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