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FAITH TIDES



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Bishop's Column: Walking home by another road

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The church and the culture of addiction

January 2026

By Faith Tides

Columns

[Bishop's Column: Walking home by another road](#)

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As 2026 begins, Bishop Anna urges everyone to be honest with themselves about any grievances they are holding on to, and to let go of these “accumulated grievances.”

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In the first of a series of posts, Lisa Alexander, Canon for Pastoral Support, writes about how we can use curiosity to upend our assumptions and improve communication with others.

[The church and the culture of addiction](#) (pg. 6)

Our Diocesan Theologian reflects on our culture of addiction, fueled by social media companies and algorithms, and the role that the church can play in fostering connection and offering an antidote to addiction.

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The first of a regular column “Alongside Hope corner” — find out more about the Mapping the Ground We Stand On workshop.

Parish News

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In December, parishioners gathered at Christ Church Cathedral to write letters to leaders around the world

to call for the release of those unjustly imprisoned or suffering human rights abuses.

[St. John's parishioners tour local restaurants to share food and fellowship](#) (pg. 5)

Meet “The Restaurantours” — a group of parishioners at St. John the Divine, Courtenay, who meet regularly to try different restaurants and encourage fellowship.

Walking home by another road



Photo Credit: J. Abrams Photography

By Anna Greenwood-Lee

Dr. Gordon Smith was one of the speakers at our incredible 2025 We Together conference. He shared a story of how when he retired from his role as the president of a university, a mentor gave him succinct and wise advice:

“No accumulated grievances.”

As someone whose daily prayers include “forgive us

our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us,” these words should not have stung in the way that they did. But they have stayed with me and caused me to do some soul searching. Like many of you, my Christmas season includes time with family. It helped me to have a little “no accumulated grievances” talk with myself before launching myself into the joys and challenges of family life.

As bishop, I would also invite the diocese, in 2026, to do our best to let go of our accumulated grievances as we launch ourselves into the joys and challenges of church life.

We can only, as people of God, as church, move at the speed of trust. We can only move into the bright future that God is always and everywhere calling us to when we are brave enough to talk about and then let go of our accumulated grievances.

It is not unusual, when I am talking with parishes about possible changes they might be called to undertake, for grievances from 5, 10, even 20 years ago to surface. Parishes and individuals lost trust in the diocese, in the bishop, in the clergy, in each other, in a neighboring parish, often for good reason. But those grievances are hindering them from having the trust and good will to move forward today.

As we begin 2026, I invite all of us in the diocese to be honest, with ourselves and one another about our accumulated grievances. Then find ways to do the work of truth telling, repentance and forgiveness. For, if I have learned anything about accumulated grievances it is that they are a heavy burden. They slow us down and get in our way. We need to let go of them if we are going to have the courage and strength to move into the bright future that God is always and everywhere

calling us to.

Lisa Alexander is our canon for pastoral support. She has extensive experience in communication, conflict resolution and reflective practice. I have asked Lisa to write a column in *Faith Tides* each month (Learning to be curious). Lisa has a lot to offer all of us as we do the life-giving and challenging work of forming healthy communities of faith.

At Epiphany we hear how the wise men, having seen the Christ child, went home by another road. May we to have the courage to set aside what is holding us back and walk on whatever new roads God is calling us to in 2026.

Learning to be curious



Photo by [Jon Tyson](#) on [Unsplash](#)

By Lisa Alexander

Recently, Jo, one of my neighbours stopped me in the parking lot. “Do you hear the hammering every

evening around 6 p.m. from Rick's apartment?" (Rick is my downstairs neighbour and her upstairs neighbour.) When I told her I didn't hear any regular hammering, she went on: "Every. Single. Evening! It's so loud! It's been going on for months." When I suggested that she knock on his door and ask him about the noise, she looked at me in horror and surprise. "But I don't talk to him!"

It's so typical, isn't it, to make all sorts of guesses about what is going on rather than straight up ask? And if we aren't making guesses, we're often making assumptions. And you know what they say about assuming.

I am fascinated by how we communicate and how misunderstandings happen. Our culture is proactive about so many things: many go to the dentist regularly; we get our vehicles serviced; we go for preventative check-ups at the doctor; we save for a rainy day; we exercise to keep our bodies strong; we learn how to fix what we have broken. Our culture values learning and skill mastery but seems to think that because we have voices and talk, we are naturals at relationships and communication. In case it needs to be stated explicitly: we are not naturals at relationships and communication. Good communication skills are learned and constantly practiced.

[In her column this month](#), Bishop Anna invites the diocese to reflect on what accumulated grievances might be holding us back from deeper trust in one another and from the bright future God is calling us towards. When Bishop Anna was describing to me the concept of moving forward at the speed of trust, I immediately blurted out that without curiosity, there can be no trust.

As a communication skill, curiosity has several facets. I am curious about what another is saying and learn the skill of making sure I've understood the speaker accurately. I am curious about what motivates someone to say and do something and learn how to ask about their motivation in a way that opens rather than closes a conversation. When I have a reaction to what someone is saying or doing, I turn my curiosity inwards and learn what my reaction is teaching me about myself and the situation. I have learned to use curiosity as a tool for connecting with myself and the people around me.

Effectively using curiosity is a skill each of us can learn. In the same way Bishop Anna is inviting the diocese to do their best to let go of accumulated grievances this year, I am inviting all of us to commit to curiosity in 2026. I'll be writing about the various facets of curiosity and how we can use this tool (if we choose!) to build healthy patterns of communication and community.

Let's go back to my neighbour and imagine how a curious conversation might have played out:

Taking a deep breath to calm herself so she can be genuinely curious and not come off as bossy or anxious, Jo knocks on Rick's door. After exchanging greetings, Jo gets straight to the point: "Each morning before work and each evening around dinner time, I hear something that sounds like hammering in your unit and I'm curious what I'm hearing, particularly because it occurs so regularly. What is it that I'm hearing?"

Slightly taken aback, Rick pauses to think. His first instinct is to get defensive and dismiss Jo as an interfering neighbour but Jo is standing quietly and calmly, waiting for his answer. Her demeanour

telegraphs that she genuinely wants to know the source of the noise, so he relaxes.

Rick thinks for a moment and then says, “I think it’s probably me banging the salt shaker. It’s my grandma’s old one and the salt is always stuck. I give it a couple of bangs to get the salt out. I didn’t realize I was doing that each time.”

They both laugh and then say goodbye, with Rick internally reminding himself not to bang and Jo sheepishly realizing the banging had nothing to do with her.

So often we make assumptions (my neighbour is thoughtless and loud) that lead to accumulated grievances (it’s been going on for ever, he is inconsiderate of my needs). Curiosity can interrupt this cycle by helping us check our assumptions. In the year ahead, I encourage you to practice getting curious in your interactions, especially your uncomfortable ones. Curiosity is a great disruptor, and it is by being more curious that we grow in openness and trust with one another.

I urge us all to do the routine maintenance work of learning and practicing these skills long before tricky situations appear. If your congregation or group is interested in this work, I’d love to hear from you to set up some time together to learn and practice these skills. You can reach me at canonlisa@bc.anglican.ca

Writing letters for social justice



Writing for rights in the cathedral chapter room. Image courtesy of Susan MacRae.

By Susan MacRae

On Saturday, Dec. 6, 2025, during the season of Advent, about 40 people gathered at Christ Church Cathedral to act for social justice. Those gathered learned about human rights abuses in eight different countries. With this information they wrote letters of advocacy and support for eight different people (and, in one or two cases, small groups) who had been unjustly imprisoned or suffered serious abuses of their human rights.

The letter writing was part of the annual Amnesty International “Write for Rights” campaign, which takes place on or around International Human Rights Day (Dec. 10). Each year, the campaign highlights case studies of real people whose human rights are being violated or who have lost their lives due to human rights violations.

For every case there are two types of messages you can write: one to a person in authority, such as a prime minister or president, and one to the person being advocated for, or their family, so they know they will never be forgotten.

I have been holding a “Write for Rights” event at the cathedral for over 13 years. This year, participants wrote 451 letters pleading for justice and mercy and offering comfort to grieving family members.

Real, physical letters can bring hope to people in the direst of situations. When letters arrive in huge numbers, they are also an unmistakable reminder to the authorities that the world is watching.

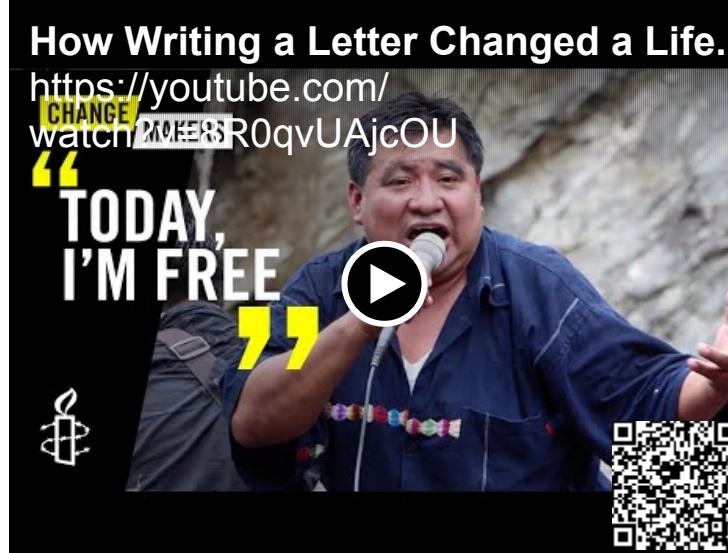
And for those who are engaging in this project as an action of their faith, letter writing becomes a prayerful project in which the person being written to or for is held in prayer by name.

[Watch a short video](#) about how Amnesty International’s Write for Change campaign helped free Guatemalan land defender Bernardo Caal Xol.

How Writing a Letter Changed a Life.

<https://youtube.com/watch?v=8R0qvUAjcOU>

“TODAY, I’M FREE”





You can still write this January [by visiting Amnesty International Canada’s website](#). And next December you could join us at the cathedral or host a letter writing event in your own parish.

If you would like to connect with me to find out what that involves, I am happy to speak with you and help you plan your event. Susan MacRae: macapplecross@gmail.com

St. John’s parishioners tour local restaurants to share food and fellowship



Photo by [Jay Wennington](#) on [Unsplash](#)

By Maureen Polard

It has been said that eating together is a blessing that fosters connection and gratitude. It can also just be fun! That is why a group of us at St. John the Divine in Courtenay — called “The Restaurantours” — gather once a month to enjoy each other’s company and to sample local restaurants.

This popular program has been happening for decades here at St. John’s. It started as a “singles’ dining club” for people who had no partner; however, it grew into a more all-inclusive group, where all are welcome.

Once a month, about 15 to 20 St. John’s parishioners and friends enjoy eating together at a local restaurant. During the summer months we meet for a supper meal and during the winter months we meet for lunch after church.

This event has become so popular that it is sometimes a challenge to find a restaurant that can accommodate our numbers. So far, we have 22 on our list of restaurants. By far the most popular is White Spot, but our list includes Chinese, Japanese, Indian, Thai and Greek food, and pubs. Some members have likes and dislikes, which we consider as much as possible, but we also have to consider ease of parking as some people have mobility problems.

Presently we have two dedicated coordinators, me (Maureen Polard), and Evelyn Bowers. They call all the members before each meal to determine the number of people who plan to attend. This call seems to be valued as a “connection call” with fellow parishioners who enjoy a phone visit.

In the Bible, shared meals often symbolize unity, fellowship and celebration. In a world increasingly characterized by division and isolation,

the simple act of sharing a meal holds deep significance. Eating together serves as an opportunity for believers to build relationships, show hospitality and remember God’s blessings.

The church and the culture of addiction



Photo by [camilo jimenez](#) on [Unsplash](#)

By John J. Thatamanil

Facebook knows me (almost) better than God knows me

In capitalism’s latest phase, we are the products being bought and sold. If we think we are getting something for free — Facebook, for example — then we’ve been had. Our attention has been hijacked and monetized. We offer invaluable assistance to marketers by informing them about what we value most through our social media behaviour.

In her book *Dopamine Nation*, Anna Lembke tells the sobering tale of how a leading addiction therapist

became addicted herself. Her gateway drug? The *Twilight* series. Really, a teen series of vampire and werewolf romance novels functioned as a drug?

To Lembke, these novels initially seemed innocent, until she found herself losing entire weekends reading increasingly explicit books at the expense of time with family, only to show up at work bleary-eyed on Monday.

My addictions? Okay, I'll fess up. My news feed is full of juicy bits of news, articles written by my learned friends, new books I *must* have, and, of course, my favourite craze, fountain pens. Don't ask me how many of these pens I have purchased in the last four years.

Facebook knows me better than I know myself, indeed (almost) as well as God knows me, because it knows my behavior, not how I like to think of myself, but what I actually do.

Why all this sobering talk of addiction in what should be a frothy January column? Many of us view the new year as an opportunity to initiate major changes. However, as I read Lembke's book — along with Christopher Hayes' new book *The Sirens' Call* — I realize that we are hopelessly outgunned.

Entire industries are at work to hook us, whether on the classical baddies — sex, alcohol and drugs — or newer, more innocuous ones like romance novels or fountain pens. We cycle from one dopamine hit to another, of course, craving a bigger hit each time because a harsh come-down follows each dopamine hit.

Churches offer an antidote to addiction

How we spend our days, even our hours, is how we spend our lives (hat tip: Annie Dillard). Real change has to be granular rather than epic. We must reclaim our hours, even our minutes, if we are to reclaim our lives.

But you may be wondering, what does any of this have to do with the church?

If we've been hacked with our own assistance, we are bound to remain entrapped in our current predicament. Our powers of resistance are no match for the forces marshalled against us. Resistance is futile — at least resistance of the self-help variety.

Moreover, this predicament is both personal and cultural. This isn't just about our individual lives, but about how our social, economic and political lives are wired around addictions, from our children's video games to our own persistent addiction to doom scrolling in an age of fascism and climate disaster.

Religious traditions have known about the human propensity for addiction for literally ever! The greatest theologian in the history of Christianity is an out-of-the-closet sex addict. I am, of course, talking about St. Augustine, who prayed the most honest prayer in the history of religion: "Oh Lord, give me chastity but not yet!"

But Augy — as I like to think of my ancient North African buddy — also knew, "Our hearts are restless until they find their rest in thee." Our addictions, innocent or otherwise, never satisfy because we are created for deeper longings.

What are these authentic longings, longings that are

not about progressing to ever escalating dopamine hits? Our longing for community; our longing to make a difference through creativity and action; our longing to belong to the natural world, our mothering home; and our longing to reconnect to the very source and ground of our lives, the one whose name and nature is Love.

Augustine taught us that there is no way to wean ourselves from addictions without surrendering our hearts to the loves for which they were truly fashioned. We belong either to our destructive addictions or to life-giving and healing powers. As St. Paul put it, we are either slaves to the powers and principalities or slaves to Christ.

Here's a helpful mantra from the addiction experts: the cure for addiction is connection. In an era of isolation, we need to reconnect with ourselves, with one another, with nature, and with God. Figuring out how to do this, through disciplines ancient and modern, that is what the church is for. Instead of generating yet another short-lived list of New Year's resolutions, let us collectively resolve to redirect the church's resources toward meeting the challenge of surviving and even thriving in an age of market-driven addiction. Now that is holy work indeed!

Reading list

Anna Lembke, *Dopamine Nation: Finding Balance in an Age of Indulgence* (2021)

Tobias Rose-Stockwell, *The Outrage Machine: How Tech Amplifies Discontent, Disrupts Democracy—And What We Can Do About It* (2023)

Christopher Hayes, *The Sirens' Call: How Attention Became the World's Most Endangered Resource* (2025)

Alongside Hope resource offers education for reconciliation



Alongside Hope

Anglicans and partners working for change in Canada and around the world

By Lynn Schumacher

Welcome to the Alongside Hope corner. I'm Lynn Schumacher, this diocese's Alongside Hope representative.

Alongside Hope (formerly the Primate's World Relief and Development Fund, or PWRDF) is an arm of the Anglican Church of Canada that partners with local organizations that carry out the life-giving work that improves food security, champions gender rights, provides training on conservation agriculture and creates income opportunities.

Alongside Hope also partners with membership organizations, which allows them to be part of a larger network. These partners include the Anglican Alliance, the ACT Alliance, the Canadian Foodgrains Bank, KAIROS and Cooperation Canada, among others.

If your parish or region is looking for an “education for reconciliation” with First Nations resource in 2026, please consider the one-day workshop [Mapping the Ground We Stand On](#), offered through Alongside Hope and available in our diocese. This resource invites participants to walk on to the northern part of the continent European settlers named North America and discover the Indigenous Peoples that have been here for thousands of years.

To find out more about how the workshop is set up, please [watch the Mapping the Ground We Stand On video](#) at the end of this post.

You may also have someone in your parish who participated in the workshop held in each region a

few years ago.

Each workshop is led by trained facilitators, has a maximum of 25 participants and lasts about 5 hours. The host church is asked to provide lunch for the presenters and Alongside Hope looks after their transportation costs. For more information or to book a workshop, please contact me by sending an email to alongsidehope@bc.anglican.ca.

Mapping the Ground We Stand On

<https://youtube.com/watch?v=fNVNw3ZiSmw>

